

STUDIES IN
CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM



W. H. DYSON

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STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

BY

W. H. DYSON

*"By love He may be gotten and holden, but by thought
or understanding never."*

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PREFACE

THE following Studies were written primarily for my own guidance, to give definiteness to thoughts suggested by a somewhat prolonged and extensive reading of the Mystics. I have also had in mind present-day questions of religious life and thought, and the influence of these has necessarily given colour to the consideration of the subject. Indeed, it is the intimate relation between Mysticism and the needs of our own time that has prompted the study. That for which the Mystics stand—intense personal religion—is, as I interpret the situation, the true solution of our problems.

There is, of course, no attempt to treat exhaustively the questions raised, and I should not have ventured upon publication but for the encouragement of others, in whose judgment the book may prove useful to some of the increasing number of those whose interest in Mysticism is newly awakened but whose opportunities of personal study have been limited.

The several chapters, while constituting separate studies, have a vital unity. Underlying all that I have written is the conviction that Religion, in its Christian form, is a Life-principle perfectly expressed in the two great Commandments of Love, and because essentially spiritual therefore mystical, in .

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the very measure of its depth and sincerity. This conviction is the ground of the contention throughout that the Christian Mystics are not isolated instances of religious genius, removed from us by incomunicable gifts and endowments, but are our "brethren in Christ," witnessing to us of "the Spirit of Christ which was in them," and calling us to share the confidence of their assurance, and to be partakers of the gladness of their joy.

To those who with strenuous labour are seeking to build up the Kingdom of God; to those who are weary and spent with ministering to the world's necessities; to those in whom the River of Life is falling low, I offer this gathering of quiet hours.

W. H. DYSON.

BIRKDALE,

SOUTHPORT,

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CHAPTER I

THE REVIVAL OF MYSTICISM

THE religious life of any period is conditioned, in outward expression, by the dominating spirit of the age. In an age characterised by great activity, when visible and tangible results are demanded, religion seeks expression in social service, and the Kingdom of Heaven is set forth pre-eminently as a Social Redemption. Almost necessarily, the emphasis is laid upon the human side in the great work of righteousness. Duty, rather than faith, is the watchword. "To labour is to pray" is the controlling idea. The call to meditation, the exercises of secret devotion, the fellowship of social prayer, these are unresponded to, almost neglected. At such a time, when spiritual religion is, apparently at least, in abeyance, it is surely a vain hope to expect, or even to speak of, a revival of Mysticism. The very type of religion which that term suggests to many is deemed unpractical and sentimental,

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or worse than that, Mysticism is thought of as but another name for mistiness and unreality. Even by thoughtful men religion is divided into different categories, Practical, Institutional, Mystical, as though each were in itself religion, adequate to the religious life of the special type of nature to which it appeals. I cannot accept this unnatural and impossible division. Vital religion is all of these, practical, institutional, mystical. It appeals to the fulness of human nature, and finds, or ought to find, its expression in all the activities of mind and of life.

The revival of Mysticism is, in my judgment, the outstanding need at the present time, that is of Mysticism *rightly interpreted and expressed*. Emphasis must be laid upon these very important qualifications. Mysticism, as it is found in Christian experience, has been and is much misunderstood, and, because misunderstood, neglected and even denounced. This conviction has grown upon me while engaged in a somewhat wide, and, I trust, sympathetic study of the subject generally, and of the writings of many of the greater Mystics, and it is with the hope of attracting others to enter upon the same study that I venture to give expression to these thoughts on Mysticism.

Surprising as it may be, considering the prevailing spirit of the age, there are very marked signs of the

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awakening of interest in this subject. If we may judge from the activity of the Press we cannot but conclude that many minds are now engaged in this study. The classics of the Mystics and selections from long-neglected mystical writings have recently been published. Even more notable is the increasing stream of new literature on the subject, critical and biographical. Indeed the publication, within a very short time, of several most scholarly and sympathetic works on Mysticism is the principal feature of present-day religious thought. Three of these really great books I have found especially helpful and stimulating. The writer known in the literary world as "Evelyn Underhill," has laid all students under great obligation by her invaluable book, *Mysticism, a Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. The writings of Dr. Rufus M. Jones are of supreme value, if for no other reason than this, that they present the subject from the sympathetic standpoint of a member of The Society of Friends. The introduction to his *Studies in Mystical Religion* impresses me as the best short exposition of Mysticism. To these two books must be added a third, Baron von Hügel's *The Mystical Element in Religion*, in many respects a very trying book both in style and in arrangement, but discussing questions which are fundamental with great skill and profound scholarship.

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Accepting as a fact the revived interest in and study of Mysticism we are led to ask what is behind this movement of thought, whence is its origin, and what is its significance for religion?

In the realm of Science new and marvellous discoveries have been made, discoveries which have gone far to revolutionise thought. The sense of the wonder and mystery of nature has again awokened. Fundamental ideas of a former generation no longer satisfy. The secrets of nature are felt to be richer and more profound than reason can comprehend, secrets which seem to belong ultimately to the spiritual, rather than to the natural realm. In the "seventies" the materialistic theory of the universe was dominant, a theory which found expression in the oft-quoted sentence of Tyndall's Belfast Address: "I discern in matter the potency and promise of all terrestrial life." How far the pendulum has swung may be judged from Sir William Crookes' Bristol Address, 1898, in which he said: "I should prefer to say that in life I see the promise and potency of all forms of matter."

In Philosophy, Eucken stands for an essentially mystical basis of religion. In all his recent writings he insists upon an independent "Spiritual Life" with which man is in fellowship, and through which alone he attains to the fulness of his own personality.

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The oppressive weight of a materialistic philosophy has been removed. Complacent confidence in "progress" has received a shock. Two generations of universal education have not wrought righteousness of life. Commercial prosperity has but forced the more upon us the grave problems of poverty. All is not well in the best of all possible worlds. The need, more or less openly confessed, is of a spiritual power, a moral, regenerating energy, "a power not ourselves making for righteousness."

In Psychology the new experimental method of study has already enlarged and enriched our ideas of personality. The "Hidden Soul" is no longer a mere poetic fancy. We have been made to realise that mind, as it manifests itself in normal consciousness, is but a fragment of a larger self which lies behind. To this must be added the new doctrine, now generally received, that communication can take place between mind and mind, independently of the recognised channels of sense. Some of the results of "Psychical Research" are now included in the new Psychology, and the influence of both on the revival of the study of Mysticism is seen in the writings of William James, the greatest exponent of the new Psychology, and especially in his Gifford Lectures (1901-2), *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which arrested very wide attention and quickened in many minds

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a new interest in the reality and significance of mystical experience.

It is, however, in religious thought itself that the movement towards Mysticism finds its direct and strongest impulse. German Mysticism was a reaction from the cold reasonings of Scholasticism, and the formalism of Ecclesiasticism. Quietism was a protest against the excessive externalism of the Roman Church. The Quakers stood for “the Inward Light” as opposed to the authority of Church and Creeds. In the history of religion progress has ever been by loss and recovery of balance, as a man walks.

The condition of religion at the present time points unmistakably to some great change. This—it is often said—is an age of transition. The old order is gone, but the new is not yet visibly manifest. Fundamental issues are raised which cannot now be met by the appeal to authority. The principle of Evolution which now controls all our thinking ; the acceptance of the methods of literary and historical criticism and their unreserved use ; the repudiation of all dogmatic authority, and the confident claim to examine all that passes for truth by the powers of reason—these are some of the forces by which religious beliefs are now tested with a severity as great or greater than in any previous age. In some cases the result has been

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disastrous. Old religious beliefs have been uprooted, and no new faiths have been implanted. In other cases the issue has been happier—the things that could be shaken have been removed, but the eternal realities have been revealed. But upon all thoughtful minds, and in the very measure of the sincerity of their convictions, the question is pressed: What is the true, firm basis of your religious life and faith?

It is just here that the new Psychology and the new Apologetics meet. Psychology insists that experience shall be accounted for, claims that experience is as real as any sensuous perception. So the religious life is cast in upon itself; the religious experience must be its own evidence.

“Believe what thou findest written in the sanctuaries of man’s soul.” Yes, but *what is* written there, and how shall we discover and interpret the writing? It is into the sanctuary of his own soul every man must enter, the thoughts of his own heart he must examine. But the task of self-knowledge is the hardest any man can set himself. “The calm of perfect knowledge, where spirit holds communion with itself, and is to itself transparent,” is a rare grace, for which not only temperament, but also environment, is absolutely essential, and that temperament has to be cultivated, that environment created. Life, for the most part,

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has to be lived at high pressure. Activity is the watchword of the hour. "The cares that occupy the passing day" are manifold and imperative. Of the prophets of truth and righteousness it has been written: "These men mustered their powers amidst the silences." Little wonder, then, that we have few prophets and seers in this busy age. To most, I fear, it can only be an academic truth:

"That we can feed this Mind of ours
In a wise passiveness."

Times of quiet are hard to find, and if found, the habit of reflection, of turning the mind inward upon itself, of communing with one's self in stillness of all other thoughts, has yet to be formed. Those "unmannerly distractions," which Faber found intruding upon the hour of prayer, are with most of us all the time. And yet the duty abides, the call is imperative. Notwithstanding all hindrances, impelled by painful soul-hunger, we must search into the realities of personal experience, and find the sure foundation of the soul's eternal life. So we turn with wistful gaze to the saints of old, to the goodly fellowship of the Mystics, whose testimony has a new significance for us, and whose mystical experience is our secret quest.

The significance for religion of this new direction of thought is a more searching question. It is always difficult to determine what is the true

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inward meaning of any movement, and to escape the error of taking accidents for essentials is not always easy. Thus, in the case before us, the new interest in Mysticism has, almost certainly, to be included in a wider trend of thought. It is one form of the activity of the historical spirit which would embrace all that is human within its scope. But this will not explain all, for there is quite certainly a deep, religious spirit beneath the movement. Some years ago the hope was cherished by many that a great creative theologian would appear, who, in the fulness of modern knowledge and the assurance of faith, should once more quicken thought and open a new vision of the eternal Gospel, a hope, however, which has not been realised, though the need which inspired the hope remains. This sense of unrest, dissatisfaction, uncertainty, the ever-deepening consciousness of something lacking in our religious life to-day, and the increasing longing for a more vital and spiritual religion, are turning the thoughts of many to the old Mystics and to their writings, if, perchance, they may learn their secret and know their assurance and their peace.

Something more than this can be said, and must be, if we are to touch the heart of the matter. Much has been written about the decadence of religion, but there is another side of the shield,

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brighter and more inspiring. Religion as it becomes less formal may become more intense ; less dependence upon externals may spring from the fuller enjoyment of the worship which is in spirit and in truth. The mystical experience is by no means a bygone story ; the great leaders of the movement in the past have their spiritual sons and daughters in our own day. In all the Churches there are those who in gladness and confidence can say "I know Him whom I have believed," a multitude which no man can number, to whom conscious communion with God, the true mystical experience, is the one reality in their lives.

The great Mystics have been named "the pioneers of the spiritual world," and we hold them in honour because of their spiritual pre-eminence. But all who have lived in and for the eternal, whose vision has embraced the realities of the spiritual world are also Mystics, a great company in every age and in every land. True, not all of these, not even many, have been conscious of "that instinct for the Absolute which is latent in man" which, according to Dean Inge, characterises the Mystic ; nor are they, in clear self-knowledge, attempting "to realise in thought and feeling the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal," as Mysticism is defined by him—these ideas are too metaphysical for them. Yet

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simple souls, in common walks of life, knowing nothing of the culture of the Schools, have lived their lives in conscious communion with the Spiritual World, counting the realities of that world the supreme good. All true religion is based upon the reality of the Spiritual; and all devout souls live and move and have their being therein. In their lives the spiritual sense has been quickened, the birth from Above is a fact of experience, and life, for them, means an “ever closer and deeper dependence on and appropriation of the fulness of the Divine Life.” It is this which vital religion in its full Christian sense always means, and means for all.

It is fully recognised that, in religious experience, as in all other departments of life, there are degrees of attainment, and that the great Mystics may be justly styled “the heroic examples of the life of Spirit.” What I wish to insist upon is that there is true Mysticism in all vital religion, and, very expressly, in the Christian religion. The assertion that “the spirit of mysticism is the true and essential Christianity” has been objected to as an extreme statement, but such a criticism, as it seems to me, arises either from a wrong idea of Mysticism, or from an inadequate realisation of what is essential Christianity.

In his Bampton Lecture (1899), which may claim

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to be one of the earliest of the modern critical studies of the subject, Dean Inge gives twenty-six definitions of Mysticism, to which his own, given above, may be added. If every type of Mysticism, Speculative, Religious, Symbolic, is included, these definitions may be multiplied almost indefinitely. By some writers Nature-Mysticism is deemed the highest, and seen in the life of a St. Francis, or breathing in the poetry of a Wordsworth, it is attractive to most minds. To others, Speculative Mysticism is the most absorbing, and Plotinus, whose Mysticism has been characterised as "the ultimate result of the whole development of Greek Philosophy," is counted "the Mystic *par excellence*."

Between Speculative and Religious Mysticism there is this important difference: in philosophic ideas the interest is mainly intellectual and consequently limited to the few highly-trained minds; in religious experience the fellowship is personal and may be shared by all. Between Nature-Mysticism and *Religious* Mysticism there is an underlying unity, for only to the religious spirit, conscious of the Divine within itself, is the vision of the Divine in Nature an inspiration and a joy. It is Religious Mysticism which is now to engage our thought.

It is necessary, however, still further to limit our subject, and more definitely to define the term Mysticism. The psychological fact upon which

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Religious Mysticism is based, has been thus stated : " Personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness " (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 379). To the Mystic, the vital element in his religion is direct and personal communion with God, religion, that is, " in its most acute, intense, and living stage." Christian Mysticism, in its essential element, is the conscious communion of the soul with God, as revealed in and through Jesus Christ.

This definition is based upon the conviction that Christianity is a Life, spiritual, eternal, a Life, from its very nature, essentially mystical. That it is possible to hold correct beliefs *about* God, and to fulfil all the outward requirements of a ceremonial religion, without living communion with God, is a fact too evident, but this is not even religion in any true sense, and, quite certainly, it is not the spiritual religion of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself is The Great Mystic—I write these words in deep reverence of spirit—His oneness with the Father, and the oneness of the faithful in Him, constitute the sublimest heights of Mysticism. And the Christian is the disciple, the follower, the imitator of Christ, whose Pre-eminence is not that of isolation but of inspiration, and whose Headship is to reproduce His Life in ours.

In this faith we realise that the Christian Scrip-

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tures are mystical throughout; not the Fourth Gospel alone, though that is deep in spiritual thought, but also the other three, in each of which is found the heart-truth of Mysticism: "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." And not in St. John's First Epistle alone, though the communion of the soul with God who is Love, in love and obedience of life, is therein so richly taught; but also, and very especially, in the Letters of St. Paul, wherein his Christian experience so deep and full is revealed, and his Gospel for all declared. In his life the words of Jesus, already quoted, find their exact fulfilment in personal experience, as his great mystical saying reveals: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me"; and in his gospel there is no less exalted hope for those who truly believe—he knows but one Spirit, one faith, one life, the life which is "hid with Christ in God."

The Christian Mystics, then, whose thoughts and lives we study, were first of all and essentially Christian men and women, the re-discoverers, in their own age, of spiritual religion. Theirs was the vision of God Himself, of God as Love and Light and Spirit, indwelling, inspiring, redeeming; the Christian faith of the Holy Ghost; the Christian doctrine of the Immanence of God.

CHAPTER II

HAVE THE MYSTICS A MESSAGE FOR US ?

Is Mysticism an abnormal or a normal element in vital religion ? The question is of supreme importance, and upon the answer our whole interest in the subject hangs. If the mystical experience in its essential nature is impossible to ordinary religious people, then our interest in it can only be intellectual, and life has other interests and duties which claim us more.

I find conflicting answers in the writings of students of the subject. Thus in Miss Underhill's invaluable study we are invited to think of the Mystics as the great explorers of the Spiritual and to give to them

“ the same attention that we give to other explorers of countries in which we are not competent to adventure ourselves ; for the Mystics are the pioneers of the spiritual world, and we have no right to deny validity to their discoveries, merely because we lack the opportunity or the courage necessary to those who would prosecute such explorations for themselves ” (pp. 4, 5).

Again she writes :

“ The Mystics show us this independent spiritual life, this fruition of the Absolute, enjoyed with a

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fulness to which others cannot attain. They are the heroic examples of the life of the spirit ; just as the great artists, the great discoverers, are the heroic examples of the life of beauty and the life of truth" (p. 41).

In each of these passages the statement is qualified, for though we may not be pioneers, cannot indeed be, in a land that has already been explored, yet we may be followers along the same way—if, indeed, we are prepared for the great enterprise. Even though we may not attain to the same fulness of the spiritual life, yet we may follow in the footsteps of the saints. If, then, these passages gave the final conclusion we should have no ground of disagreement, but the author of *Mysticism* makes other and far more definite statements.

To affirm that "only Mystics can really write about *Mysticism*" is to sound a much-needed note of warning. The blind cannot appreciate colour. Our anxious question is : are *ordinary* religious men and women incapacitated by "colour-blindness" ? Is the mystic sense lacking wholly, or is the religious man, by virtue of his religious consciousness, a seer, if but dimly ? The author leaves us in no doubt as to her own conclusions. The history of *Mysticism*, she says, "demonstrates plainly enough that there is developed in some men another sort of consciousness, another 'sense' beyond those normal qualities of the self which we have discussed"

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(p. 59). She speaks of an “abnormal and highly-sensitised type of mind which we call mystical” (p. 70), a “peculiar mental make-up,” so that we may speak of “the born mystic,” as we speak of “the born musician and poet” (p. 78).

Pressed to their full meaning these statements leave us in no doubt as to the opinion held. The Mystics stand apart, a class to themselves, endowed with powers which are not given to all, which, in fact, are the peculiar inheritance of the few elect souls. For one here and there the study of *Mysticism* *may* prove as the Divine voice calling to the Mount of Vision, but for the rest of us there is nothing left but to walk the common path, and live our life, as best we may, on the lower plains.

But is this conclusion justified ? The quotations given *seem* to be conclusive, but I am not at all sure that we do the author justice by so interpreting them. Had this been her final word I do not think she would have written *Mysticism*, and certainly it would not have been the really great book it is. It must be of some “accident” of *Mysticism* and not of its essential quality that such statements are made.

Perhaps the following may be accepted as her final judgment :

“ Just as genius in any of the arts is—humanly speaking—the final term of a power of which each

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individual possesses the rudiments, so mysticism may be looked upon as the final term, the active expression, of a power latent in the whole race; the power, that is to say, of so perceiving transcendent reality. Few people pass through life without knowing what it is to be at least touched by this mystical feeling" (p. 87).

In referring to the *accidents* of Mysticism I have in mind several considerations which are of the utmost importance if we are to come to any true conclusion as to its normal or abnormal character.

(1) Due allowance must always be made for the influences of time and place. All our experience is toned by our expectations, determined in great measure by our beliefs. This is true in a marked degree of religious experience.

"The actual mystical *views* of any given period, the symbolism through which these inward experiences are expressed, the 'revelations' which come to mystical prophets, all bear the mark and colour of their particular age. There are no 'pure experiences,' *i.e.*, no experiences which come wholly from *beyond* the person who has them" (*Studies in Mystical Religion* p. xxxiv.).

There is a very definite allowance which has to be made for the Mysticism of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. That was, in spirit at least, the rise of essential Protestantism in the midst of dominant Catholicism. Men and women trained in a religion of externalism discovered for themselves a direct way to God. For them religion henceforth

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had "the throb of personal experience in it." Their life stands out in sharp and challenging outline against the spirit of their age. They were no longer merely "Religious," devoted by vows to the practice of rites and ceremonies, they were devout, spiritual men who had personal experience of religion "in its most acute, intense, and living stage."

The fact that Priests and People alike made religion a mockery by their irreligious lives served the more to isolate the Mystics from their fellows, to give deeper significance to their experience, and to determine their mission. To St. Catherine of Siena (1347—1380) the corruptions of the Church were her Cross, and her life-work was to restore the spiritual power of the Church. "Holy Church," she wrote, "should return to her first condition—poor, humble, and meek. For ever since the Church has aimed more at temporal than at spiritual things it has gone from bad to worse" (*Letters*, pp. 119—121). From her writings we learn that "moral corruption was rampant in the convents and monasteries, amongst men and women alike" (Gardner's *Saint Catherine of Siena*, p. 3).

The evidence of Thomas à Kempis is to the same effect. In his book, *The Founders of the New Devotion*, and writing of Gerard the Great (1340—1384), he says :

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“ Now at that time particularly the disposition of the world seemed to be on all sides turned to evil, so that there were few who preached the Word of Life both by example and precept, and fewer still who followed the rule of contingency ” (p. 9).

This isolation of character and inevitable antagonism to the irreligion of the day could not fail to affect the life and thought of the devout. One good resulted—many of the Mystics, far from being “ recluses,” out of touch with affairs, shut up to the enjoyment of their own devotion, were active and aggressive, reformers before the Reformation, and their thoughts could not fail to be moulded by their mission. I do not say that this antagonism caused them to *exaggerate* their own religious experience, but it could not fail to make them realise more vividly the value of personal piety, and to speak and write of the new devotion in terms which could not fail to sound strange in their own age and which have not wholly lost that note for ours.

(2) The spirit of the age must always influence thought—but allowance must also be made for peculiarities of disposition.

Principal Lindsay, in his *History of the Reformation*, supplies a very good illustration of this personal equation. Writing of St. Ignatius (1491—1556), he says :

“ This intensity of the Spanish character, this

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temperament distinguished by force rather than moderation, easily gave birth to superstition and burning devotion, and both furnished a fruitful soil for the extravagances of Mysticism, which affected every class in society" (II. p. 530).

St. Ignatius himself was carried away by his own passionate enthusiasm. "He believed that he could actually see with bodily eyes divine mysteries which the intelligence could not comprehend." "He felt assured he could *see* the mystery of Transubstantiation actually taking place." For him "the Incarnation of our Lord, the Holy Trinity, the personality of Satan, were translated into visible symbols which made them plainly understood."

The influence of St. Ignatius was far-reaching. He is thought of mainly as the founder of the Society of Jesus, but he was a true mystic. His spiritual experience, as Dr. Lindsay shows, was almost identical with Luther's. "The words used by the two great religious leaders were different, but the experience of pardon won by throwing one's self upon the mercy of God was the same." St. Teresa (1515—1582), and through her St. John of the Cross (1542—1591), were greatly influenced by the life of St. Ignatius, and in reading their writings we realise over and over again the importance of making due allowances for peculiarities of disposition.

But there is a more evident direction in which

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this caution must be observed. Ecstasy and Mysticism have been very closely related, indeed the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, as representing that "transport of feeling in which thought and will are merged."

In the lives of some of the Mystics we are confronted again and again with abnormal experiences. We are told of visions and voices and external signs. The "ecstasy" of the Mystics is counted a supreme favour, and their abnormal experience is one ground of their canonisation. It is quite certain that among the really great Mystics there have been men and women of exceptional and quite extraordinary "psychic" powers. Probably we touch here one of the reasons, perhaps the chief reason, why the Mystics, as such, are thought of as possessing some "sense" or "faculty" over and above the common endowment. The more, therefore, does it need to be asserted with all possible emphasis that *the possession of extraordinary powers has no essential relation to Religious Mysticism.*

There have been Mystics who were also "Psychics," but there have also been Mystics innumerable who were not. The *conscious* possession of these strange powers is certainly rare, and if their exercise is bound up inseparably with Mysticism then is it indeed abnormal, and may well be distrusted by devout souls. We may indeed rejoice that

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while “psychic” gifts are rare, the mystical experience belongs to “the multitude which no man can number.”

(3) In one remarkable gift the Mystics who are best known to us are indeed pre-eminent—they possessed the literary gift, the gift of expression. They could interpret their experience, and so quicken and illuminate the experience of others.

Miss Underhill’s illustrations are suggestive. There is a genius of the Artist, the Poet, the Musician, a genius unshared by the ordinary man. But wherein is the genius? It is not the Artist alone, the great landscape painter, who gazes entranced upon the sunset glory. It is not the Poet alone who has felt “a presence which disturbed him with the joy of elevated thought.” In this experience many share who cannot be credited with “genius” in any measure. The *genius* of the Painter and the Poet lies in this—they are able to interpret and express the transcendent vision, the conscious emotion, the hidden experience, and communicate it in colour and in song. Even so is it in Religion.

The uniqueness of the great Mystics was not in their experience, but in their gift of telling the vision, rare gift as it often was. “It is one grace,” writes St. Teresa, “that our Lord gives grace; it is another grace to understand what grace and what gift it is; and it is another and further grace

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to have the power to describe and explain it to others" (*Life of St. Teresa*, p. 136).

Here, I think, we discover the special power of the great Mystics whose writings supply the basis of our study. They were men and women of exceptional gifts, both of thought and of expression. No one can read *The Imitation* or St. Augustine's *Confessions* without realising that a master-mind speaks. These books rank amongst the world's treasures. But the "uniqueness" is not so much in the religious experience of the writers as in their ability to tell the story.

Thomas à Kempis was one of a large brotherhood of like-minded men, and what has made his name to stand out so markedly was not that he alone of all the brotherhood had the mystic experience, the deep, rich, personal religious life of *The Imitation*, but that his, pre-eminently, was the gift of writing. He was the ready scribe of the Community, the historian and the preacher. There was another à Kempis, an elder brother, John, to whom Thomas went for guidance and instruction, but of John à Kempis we know very little, for his was not the gift of writing. So has it ever been; behind the outstanding figures, the leaders and teachers, there have always been a body of believers, men and women of the devout life, Mystics as truly as these better-known saints.

Have the Mystics a Message for Us ?

We read the *Confessions* with wonder and reverence. By all Mystics of a later age St. Augustine has been looked up to as to a great Master. But behind his life was another, as rich in vital religion, and even in *visions of the Lord*, the saintly Monica, whose tender, trustful prayers for her son stir our hearts to tears. In that hour when mother and son stood together " seeking between themselves, in the presence of the Truth, of what nature the eternal life of the saints would be," we know that not St. Augustine alone but the Mother Saint as truly as her son must be numbered with the great Mystics. Together they passed into a very ecstasy of joy so that " the very highest pleasure of the carnal sense, and that in the very brightest material light, seemed by reason of the sweetness of that life not only not worthy of comparison, but not even of mention, we lifting ourselves with a more ardent affection towards ' the Self-same ' did gradually pass through all corporeal things, and even the heaven itself, where sun, and moon, and stars shine upon the earth ; yea, we soared higher yet by inward musing and discoursing, and admiring Thy works ; and we came to our own minds and went beyond them, that we might advance as high as that region of unfailing plenty, where Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth, and where life is that Wisdom by whom all

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these things are made, both which have been and which are to come." The Mother shared the experience, but the Son tells the vision.

We know of certain of the Mystics through their writings, but behind the known, and often in closest fellowship with them, were the unknown saints, unknown and unnamed for the most part, who shared the deeper faith and the fuller life. Every great religious movement has had its prophets, whose special gifts of leadership and of utterance have brought them enduring fame, but behind them has been the great company of the faithful, whose fellowship of faith has made possible the prophet's mission.

CHAPTER III

THE ABNORMAL IN MYSTICISM

THE questions discussed in the last chapter are of such vital importance to a true understanding of Mysticism, that we must return to them again. Unless we can come to some definite conclusion as to the place and meaning for the Mystics themselves, and for us, of the abnormal in their experience, we shall fail to profit by our study of the subject generally. For my own part I accept this statement :

“ The downright ecstasies and hearers of voices and seers of visions have all, wherever we are able to trace their temperamental and neural constitution and history, possessed and developed a definitely peculiar psycho-physical organisation ” (*The Mystical Element of Religion*, II., p. 42).

The discussion by Baron von Hügel of these psycho-physical and temperamental questions is most illuminating. He speaks with the authority of profound knowledge, and with the religious sympathy of a devout Catholic.

I propose to ask this question : What do the Mystics themselves say about their abnormal experiences ?

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(1) In some cases they warn us against reading a sensuous meaning into their accounts of voices and visions. This may be best illustrated from *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, written by herself.

To St. Teresa "locutions" were an ordinary occurrence in her life, and she discusses them very fully. "A real locution"—she writes—"is nothing else but a word uttered by one, and listened to by another," and from which it is impossible to turn away attention. "The words are very distinctly formed; *but by the bodily ear they are not heard*. They are, however, much more clearly understood than they would be if they were heard by the ear" (p. 214). Then, as to visions, which also were of frequent occurrence, she writes :

"I was in prayer one day, when I saw Christ close by me, or, to speak more correctly, felt Him; for *I saw nothing with the eyes of the body, nothing with the eyes of the soul*. He seemed to me to be close beside me; and I saw, too, as I believe, that it was He who was speaking to me. *The vision was not imaginary; I saw no form*" (p. 233).

St. Teresa writes with great, even surprising wisdom of these voices and visions, but the essential matter is her clear knowledge that these were not outward and sensuous, but inward and spiritual. I believe she would have us interpret in the same way all her special visitations, though she does not always repeat her caution. Thus when she tells

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how, on one occasion, when holding in her hand the Cross of her rosary, the Lord took it from her into His own hand, and returned it, "but it was then four large stones incomparably more precious than diamonds," and so it always appeared to her from that time. She adds : "I never saw the wood of which it was made, but only the precious stones. *They were seen, however, by no one else—only by myself*" (p. 262). I take this last statement as giving the key to the whole story. No one else would have seen the transference of the Cross—the whole was in the realm of spirit.

In contrast we may turn to the story she tells of one whom she revered as a saint :

"A year before his death," she writes, "he appeared to me, being far away. I knew he was about to die, and so I sent him word to that effect, when he was some leagues from here. When he died, he appeared to me, and said that he was going to his rest. I did not believe it. I spoke of it to some persons, and within eight days came the news that he was dead—or, to speak more correctly, he had begun to live for evermore" (p. 244).

This story will not surprise those who are familiar with the records of The Society for Psychical Research. If we may read into the words "appeared to me" their significance in similar stories, then we may say that St. Teresa knew quite well what a *seeming objective vision* was, and her clear denial of

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any such objectivity, whether real or apparent, in her religious experiences is the more significant.

(2) The Mystics affirm that all abnormal experiences must be severely tested. It is indeed a painful side of our study of this subject to find how devout souls were tortured by the fear that their voices and visions might be of Satanic origin. "Satan very quickly betrays himself," is St. Teresa's opinion, but it was not the confident assurance of many others.

The decisive test in St. Teresa's experience she declares to have been this: "The words formed by the understanding effect nothing; but, when our Lord speaks, it is at once word and work" (p. 215).

It will be noticed that auto-suggestion was fully recognised by St. Teresa as a possible source of her locutions. It is in this direction that many will turn for a full explanation of all these experiences. But I cannot accept it as such. It leaves out of account the essential element in the experience: the overwhelming sense of an authority *not of self*. It begs the whole question of the reality of a Spiritual World, and of God.

The spiritual guides and teachers of Mysticism knew better, but just because they knew that there was a Power, or Powers, not ourselves, they insisted upon "trying the spirits, whether they be of God."

Walter Hilton (ob. 1396), whose *Scale of Perfection*

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ought to be read by all students of our subject, urges this very searching test of all feelings and voices and visions. What is their effect—do they cause delight in themselves, and the longing for their return, or do they make the soul more devout, more fervent in prayer, more wise to think spiritual thoughts, more full of love to God and love to neighbour, and more lowly minded (pp. 14, 15) ?

So, too, in the matter of bodily penance, the extremes of which have ever been the chief cause of all manner of delusions, he urges discretion, saying “ the mean is the best ” (p. 32).

(3) The argument can be carried a step further. These experiences are not to be relied upon, not to be sought, not even to be desired ; they are a hindrance, not a help, to spiritual life.

This counsel is urged by Father Baker (1575—1641) with great force :

“ As for extraordinary supernatural inspirations, illuminations, apparitions, voices, conversations with spirits, messages from heaven, etc., a spiritual internal liver is forbidden to pretend to, or so much as desire them ; yes, rather to pray against them, lest he should abuse them to vanity and pride.” (*Holy Wisdom*, p. 72).

But it is to St. John of the Cross we must turn for the most emphatic direction. (The quotations are from his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.) Writing of

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sense perceptions of an extraordinary character, he says :

“ Though all these may happen to the bodily senses in the way of God, we must never rely on them, nor encourage them. Yea, rather we must fly from them, without examining whether they be good or evil ” (p. 104).

Even of mental images and forms he says :

“ The soul must not willingly accept them, nor rest upon them ” (p. 136). “ He who shall now desire to know anything by extraordinary supernatural ways, implies a defect in God, as if He has not given us enough when He gave us His only Son ” (p. 186). “ One good work, or act of the will, wrought in charity is more precious in the eyes of God than that which all the visions and revelations of heaven might effect. Many souls, to whom visions have never come, are incomparably more advanced in the way of perfection than others to whom many have been given ” (p. 195).

(4) So we reach our final conclusion. These abnormal experiences are not of the essence of Mysticism. All that is vital is found apart from them. The proof of this is found in the Mystics themselves.

Thomas à Kempis (1380—1471) has been classed as a “ half-mystic,” and if, indeed, the perfect Mystic is “ one who relies upon the Inner Light and *shuts his eyes to facts*, ” we may rightly rejoice in his imperfection. But Thomas à Kempis was a religious Mystic, and was recognised as such by

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Mystics themselves. The *Imitation* was one of the books which, according to St. Teresa's Constitutions, every Prioress was bound to provide for her Convent.

Its author is a notable instance of Mysticism freed from all confusion of voices and visions. True he had three visions of a remarkable character, but their character is clearly indicated. One sentence in the story of each gives the key: "While he was resting on his bed, behold!" "One night he saw himself in a dream seated with other students. . . ." "He saw in the heavens. . . . And immediately in his sleep he heard. . . ." The *Imitation* is a mystical guide. It has the faults of its age, or rather the limitations of its time and place, but it has spoken and will continue to speak to the devout in all ages.

Ranking with the *Imitation* we place *Theologia Germanica*, of which Luther wrote: "Next to the Bible and St. Augustine, no book hath ever come into my hands from which I have learnt more of what God and Christ and Man and all things are." To these I would add *The Cloud of Unknowing*—one sentence from which gives us the very heart of mystical teaching: "By love He may be gotten and holden, but by thought or understanding never." In these writings it is not in visions and ecstasies that true religion is found, but in the Kingdom within, the life with God and in God.

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This was the unwearying witness of Tauler, the great preacher of the mystical way. To him the religion of experience was all in all ; in his sermon on the Feast of St. Augustine, under the text : “ Watch ye, therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come,” he sounds the deepest note of Mysticism :

“ This marriage, from which the Lord comes, is in the very innermost parts of the soul, where the Image of God is. The nearness of the soul to God, and of God to the soul, the wonderful works God does there, and the joy and delight which God has there, are beyond all reason and understanding ; although man himself knows nothing and feels nothing thereof. But the men in whom God thus rejoices, and with whom He thus unites Himself, are the men who have turned with all their hearts and all their desires to God, away from the world and all creatures, and who ever desire to live only unto Him.”

But it is useless to press the argument further. If to these names we add those of Walter Hilton and Father Baker, whose clear testimony we have already given, we have a band of Mystics, saintly, wise, and richly endowed, whose combined witness is conclusive.

The mystical experience, in its essence, is wholly independent of any and every form of “ ecstasy.” It is a spiritual quest, and a spiritual experience, the quest of God, and the finding, say rather the being found, of Him.

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Every sincere Christian is a Mystic, and must be, if his religion is not mere formalism. Men and women, poor it may be in this world's riches, ignorant of its wisdom, but "rich towards God," and wise in faith, know in personal experience the peace, the joy, the hope which the Mystics counted the supreme good.

I recall, in wonder and in reverence, the simple faith, the clear vision, the abounding hope of a poor man, almost blind, blind to the glory of this world but seeing the unseen with eyes undimmed ; I hear him again in prayer, how near God was to him, how intimate their fellowship, what flights of eloquence, what wealth of imagery, what child-likeness of simple trust ! He was the one great Mystic whom I have personally known. Would that our Churches numbered more such saints ! They do number many in their ranks, and these, be they few or many, are the salt of the Church, keeping it still sweet and Christian.

"The Church can never get rid of the mystic spirit ; nor should she attempt to do so, for it is, in fact, her life. It is another name for Conscience, for freedom, for the rights of the individual soul, for the grace and privilege of direct access to the Redeemer, for the presence of the Divine Spirit in the heart " (*Unity in Diversity*, Dr. Bigg, p. 93).

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTIC WAY

THE treatment of this subject in Miss Underhill's *Mysticism* is very full. Considerably more than half the book is devoted to it. Her reading has been very wide, and her conclusion, which may be accepted absolutely, is that "no one Mystic can be discovered in whom all the observed characteristics of the transcendental consciousness are resumed, and who can on that account be treated as typical" (p. 204). This fact is most significant. *All* the observed characteristics are not essential, and our aim must be to discover the common factors, the underlying unity of experience.

The books of the Mystics were written for the guidance and help of disciples. In some cases, the authors tell the story of their own religious life, how they found God. These mystical writings are always the most interesting, though even these require to be read with some reserve. An experience is one thing, but the statement of an experience is almost always coloured. Seldom is the narrative contemporaneous with the experience. Reflection, and the ruling purpose of edification, are apt to over emphasise and even to distort simple facts.

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In other cases mystical writings have been prepared as manuals of devotion, *based*, no doubt, upon their author's experience, but written in more general terms. These are open to the danger of formalism. They frequently evidence the study of earlier writings, and are coloured by the accepted "system" of their time. This was especially true of the "Speculative" Mystics.

The influence of Plotinus was far reaching. It entered into and dominated Christian thought for many centuries, through the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius. Through this "anonymous, mysterious man" the Neoplatonic philosophy "was brought over into the Church, and became 'spiritual bee-bread' for many centuries" (*Studies in Mysticism*, p. 98). Scholastic speculation coloured all mystical writings. The religion of experience became systematised, and only when the influence of Dionysius ceased to control thought, did the imitation of Christ, and the religion of His Apostles, become again paramount.

If, then, we would enter into the inheritance of the faith we must get behind and beneath this speculative element, and all formal "cataloguing of stages of experience," to the common and essential religion of experience.

The division of the religious life into three stages, purgative, illuminative, unitive, is found in most of

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the mystical writers. The soul must be cleansed and enlightened in order that it may be united with God.

The tendency to systematise is seen even in the *Theologia Germanica*, where the “three stages by which a man is led upwards till he attaineth true perfection” are again sub-divided.

“The purification concerneth those who are beginning or repenting, and is brought to pass in a threefold wise: by contrition and sorrow for sin, by full confession, by hearty amendment. The enlightenment belongeth to such as are growing, and also taketh place in three ways: to wit, by the eschewal of sin, by the practice of virtue and good works, and by the willing endurance of all manner of temptation and trials. The union belongeth to such as are perfect, and also is brought to pass in three ways: to wit, by pureness and singleness of heart, by love, and by the contemplation of God, the Creator of all things” (Ch. XIV.).

This sub-division is not followed, indeed it is not found, in the edition which Luther used. The aim of the author is really to simplify, rather than systematise. He reduces all to the denial of self-will, and the exercise of love. It is in “the self, the I, the Me, the Mine, that is, self-seeking and selfishness,” he finds the root of all evil. “If there were no self-will there would be no Devil and no Hell.” The doing of the Will of God is life and joy—“I would fain be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man.” And this Will is ever and in all

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things, Love. “Knowledge and light profit nothing without Love.”

The threefold division can thus be reduced to a twofold : *e.g.*, Mortification and Prayer, as was done by many. There must be *detachment*, the breaking away from all lusts of the flesh, and *attachment*, the fixing of the soul in goodness and in God.

Thus Eckhart in his sermon on Sanctification says :—

“Ways of living are many ; one lives thus, and another thus ; but whosoever will reach the highest life, let him in a few words hear the conclusion of the whole matter : Keep thyself clear of all men, keep thyself from all imaginations that crowd upon the mind, free thyself from all that is contingent, entangling, and cumbersome, and direct thy mind always to gazing upon God in thy heart, with a steadfast look that never wavers.”

More helpful, I think, is the testimony of Gerson, accepted and enforced by Molinos, in *The Spiritual Guide* :

“Though I have spent forty years in reading and prayer, yet I could never find any more effectual way for attaining to Mystical Theology than that the spirit should become as a young child or as a beggar in the presence of God.”

This brings our thought more into line with our Christian Scriptures, which must be our best guide in spiritual life. The turning away from all self-trust and self-will, from all sin, and the turning to

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God in reverence and obedience and love, is the life to which we are called. And this is one act of the whole man ; an act not done "once for all," but repeated over and over again, all through life, in ever-deepening reality.

The "Scale" in Music is a natural division of sound, but Music is found in harmony. So, in the religious experience, while it is possible and useful to speak of several notes, yet in actual experience, these are blended, and it is the harmony which is known. In mental philosophy it is useful to classify the powers of mind, as reason, affection, will ; but in every movement of the self, it is the whole self which acts. So in religious experience, the great stages are never isolated ; they run into one another, not always in equal proportions, and in some measure the soul is being cleansed, and enlightened, and unified in every spiritual movement. It is the recognition of this fact which gives to the *Imitation* its pre-eminent place.

Human nature varies so much in every way that it is quite impossible to lay down rules for universal guidance. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." "The city lieth four-square" with gates on every side, and—may we not add?—with paths innumerable leading to them. "There are as many ways to Heaven as there are blades of grass pointing upwards."

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It is good, therefore, to find that there are Mystical Guides who do not insist upon all treading one path. Thus Father Baker writes :—

“ The instructor’s office is not to teach his own way nor indeed any determined way of prayer, etc., but to instruct his disciples how they may themselves find out the way proper for them.” (*Holy Wisdom*, p. 85). “ Such is the inexplicable variety of internal dispositions that the same course and order in all things will scarce save any two souls ” (p. 88).

In *The Scale of Perfection*, which would well repay fuller examination in this connection, Walter Hilton says :—

“ Not that I would by these discourses limit God’s working by the law of my speaking, as to say that God worketh thus in a soul and no otherwise. No, I mean not so, but I speak after my simple feeling that our Lord worketh thus in some creatures as I conceive. And I hope well also that He worketh otherwise, which passeth my wit and my feeling ” (p. 235).

The same spirit is found in Richard Rolle (1300—1349), “ the earliest in time of our famous English Mystics.” After giving a form of words to hold in thought at all times—he adds :

“ Or if thou hast other thoughts, that thou hast more sweetness in and devotion than in those that I teach thee, thou may’st think them. For I hope that God will put such thoughts in thine heart as

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He is pleased with, and as thou art ordained for" (*The Form of Perfect Living*, p. 45).

The lowly spirit of these early English Mystics is very marked. There is no trace of mere personal authority or dictatorship in their writings. It is as "fellow Helpers to the truth" they desire to be received. "If it do thee good and profit to thee, thank God, and pray for me" (*The Form of Perfect Living*, p. 79). It is quite possible, therefore, to make too much of these formal divisions. They are important, but should be used to help and not fetter the spiritual life. The better way, however, is to try to get at the very heart of mystic experience, and of this we are never left in doubt. With one voice all the Religious Mystics set forth "Love" as the crown of perfection, the fruition of all beatitude. "God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him."

To understand and interpret aright this great truth of God's essential character, and of the soul's fellowship with God, is the highest wisdom. Mystical Theology has been named "the science of love, by which the divine verities are not only learned, but at the same time are ^{also} relished also." This is the definition of St. John of the Cross in his *Spiritual Canticle of The Soul and The Bridegroom Christ*, which, as its title indicates, is based upon "The Song of Solomon." This love song has been, and is still,

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very dear to the heart of saintly men and women, and it has coloured, in some cases almost dominated, the writings of some Mystics, to their hurt, and our distaste. It is always a satisfaction to find this symbol ignored. For even St. John of the Cross does not wholly escape extravagances. Thus he writes : “ An instant of pure love is more precious in the eyes of God and the Soul, and more profitable to the Church, than all other good works together ” (p. 223). We turn with satisfaction from this thought to the words of a greater St. John : “ This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” Love active, expressed in service, is surely more than love inactive, absorbed in its own rapture.

Our own English Mystic, Richard Rolle, has in glowing words described what Love is and works :

“ Love is a burning yearning after God, with a wonderful delight and certainty.”

“ Love is a life, joining together the loving and the loved.”

“ Love makes us one with God. Love is the beauty of all virtues.”

“ Love is a stirring of the soul for to love God for Himself, and all other things for God.”

“ Truth may be without love ; but it cannot help without it. Love is a perfection of learning, virtue of prophecy, fruit of truth, help of sacraments, establishing of wit and knowledge ; riches of pure men ; life of dying men ” (*The Form of Perfect Living*, pp. 55—57).

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Here, then, is the harmony of the three notes of the Mystic Scale—for love at once purifies, illumines, and unites the soul to God. It is “the expulsive power of a new affection,” which drives out all unrighteousness. This is the essential Gospel: it is “the goodness of God which leadeth to repentance.” This way of true holiness is definitely taught by Spiritual Guides; but it is implied in their reverence of “The Sacred Humanity,” and their insistent requirement of meditation upon the Life and the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Here, again, I quote from Richard Rolle, though I have other references before me. He writes:

“ If thou wilt be well with God, and have grace to rule thy life, and come to the joy of love: this name Jesus, fasten it so fast in thy heart that it come never out of thy thought. . . . If thou thinkest Jesus continually, and holdest it firmly, it purges thy sin, and kindles thine heart; it clarifies thy soul, it removes anger and does away slowness. . . . It opens heaven, and makes a contemplative man ”
(The Form of Perfect Living, p. 53).

This, then, as I read the story, is the message of the Mystics to all who would enter into their secret peace and joy—they bid us think, and meditate, and pray. They tell us that the Great Reality, God, is known in silence; that His Holy Place is in the soul, and that to get alone with God is the way of life. They bid us hold before the mind the Jesus of the

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Gospel story, if we would know, in truth, the mind and will of God, the Love which God is. This “ freedom of the will,” at least, we have: we *can* hold Jesus before the mind and prolong the consideration of Him. How truth is vitalised is God’s secret. “ Man cannot without God ; God may not without man.”

The Mystics divide life into two—the Active, and the Contemplative, and their books were written, for the most part, for the guidance of *Contemplatives*. To withdraw themselves from all secular life, and even from the office of the Priesthood, seemed good and wise to them. We need not discuss *their* duties, enough that we know and do *our own*. But this must be said—it is not to *Contemplatives* alone that the mystic experience belongs. Jesus Himself lived the “ Active ” life. The great missionary Apostle was no “ Contemplative,” and shall we say that St. Paul did not attain to the “ Unitive ” Life ? “ Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on”—that is the true Christian Perfection, in this life certainly—the perfection of unceasing endeavour. There are, and must be, degrees of attainment, but the measure of this is not in visible expression, but in inward purpose, in love, and the truth holds still: “ much forgiveness, much love.”

But the law abides: without “ contemplation ” there can be no spiritual progress, and no depth and

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warmth of religious experience. Here, for us, is the opening of the mystic way. We must find time for quiet thought. The need for this is well known and often spoken of. We are so pre-occupied, "lost among the stuff" of life. Business and politics and pleasures fill life to overflowing. Even the Church can find no place for Prayer. Organisations are innumerable, and what with running these, and running here and everywhere to fulfil engagements, even our spiritual leaders have scarce time left for true meditation. "Clergymen are often tempted by the devil to turn their meditation into a work of sermon-making" (*Ara Coeli*, p. 72, note).

Yet it is to the ministers of the Churches, our preachers and teachers, we look for leadership in this movement, and that they may lead, they must set the example of serious devotion. The true note of Mysticism must be heard in their sermons. Out of a deepened life they alone can hope to quicken the deeper life in others. Not by exhortation however earnest, nor by exposition however lucid, will they lead their people along the mystic way, but by themselves entering therein. Only as they see the Vision of God can they reveal it. Only as they themselves are purified and illumined and made one with God will they draw their hearers into His Presence and kindle the fire that flames forth in prayer and faith, and glows in works of holy love.

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In all the Churches there are faithful men and women who earnestly desire for themselves and for the whole Church a revival of spiritual religion, and who are looking to their spiritual Leaders with wistful eyes to lead them into the larger life of fuller faith and richer experience.

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CHAPTER V

MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Is the mystical consciousness limited to the verifying and vitalising of truth already received, or are new revelations given? The importance of this question cannot well be over-estimated.

It is the common confession of all saintly souls that goodness is ever and always of God, "the fruit of the Spirit." It is in this sense we are to interpret the oft-quoted and usually misunderstood phrase in the General Confession: "There is no health in us," *i.e.*, there is no self-healing, no healing power in and of ourselves.

"And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone."

Even so also is it of Truth. All knowledge is a communication of the Divine Mind. In the realms of Science itself there is no "logic of discovery." New ideas are given to thought, rather than won by thinking.

What is told us of Herbert Spencer is of great interest in this connection.

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“ His inactive disposition recoiled from the notion of wrestling with a problem in an attempt to solve it. Whenever he was confronted with a problem whose solution was not obvious to him he would push it aside, and abandon all conscious effort to solve it. But the matter would not usually be entirely lost sight of ; it would stick in the back of his mind, and by and by, very likely while thinking of something else, a little inward flash would occur, rendering the solution somewhat less obscure than it was before. With the lapse of time other flashes would follow ; and after several years, maybe, the solution of that problem would be set forth with the marvellous lucidity that Spencer commanded, as an integral portion of his system of philosophy ” (*Letters of J. S. Mill*, Intro. p. xxviii).

This, we shall be told, is the working of the *sub-conscious self*. But this only puts the problem further back. A name is not an explanation, though it too often ranks as such. At the sight of some new wonder we exclaim “ Manna ! ”—What is it ?—and are satisfied that we know.

Intuition, insight, uprushes of clear thought are known to us all, but their secret springs are hidden from us. Truth flashes upon the mind, comes as a surprise, not unfrequently as an unwelcome surprise, conflicting with prejudices and cherished beliefs. In our moral judgments this is a constant experience. Duty appeals to us, not as self-selected, but as commanded, and with a *personal*

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emphasis as of another and higher Self—"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you."

In this wider sense, Mysticism enters into the whole of life. There is a mystical element in all moral judgments, and in all intellectual apprehensions of truth. The Divine Spirit quickens all human powers, thought, feeling, will. But our concern now is with Christian Mysticism, as immediate, conscious communion with God in and through Christ, and, for this religious experience, belief that God is, and knowledge of the historic Jesus, are essential conditions.

In this experience the vital element is the sense of God's Presence, a sense varying, indeed, in degree, from an arresting sense of a Personal Will other and higher than our own, to the full rapture of holy love. In this mystic consciousness the impression is not that of *new* truth, but of the supreme value of all truth, and the august authority of all righteousness. The great ends of life receive Divine Sanction, and all motives are resolved into the Will of God. The thoughts of the heart are cleansed, and the soul's vision of religious truth, in its moral significance, is enlarged and strengthened.

In so far, then, as religious insight is dependent upon character, the mystical experience, by enriching character does also enrich the knowledge of truth, but it is ever of truth as life. Communion

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with God is the inspiration of spiritual life, not the strengthening of the reasoning faculties. The mystical consciousness provides the dynamic of faith, not the skill of the logician. While, then, there is no "Mystic-Creed" as such, yet there are important truths which are known in fuller, richer measure by the Mystics, and which are enforced by them in all their writings.

Limiting our consideration of Mysticism to its religious and Christian phase, we shall find that two great subjects of thought stand out pre-eminently : God, and the Soul, in their essential moral nature, and in their relation to one another. If the witness of the Mystics is indeed true, and man *can come into direct, conscious communion with God*, this fact alone must have deep significance.

Speculative Mysticism finds its delight in this theme, and has not escaped the errors of Pantheism, in its doctrine of God ; and Deification, in its conception of man. But this speculative philosophy is not integral to Religious Mysticism. Were these high realms of thought to be climbed by all who would attain to "perfection," then must hopeless despair paralyse endeavour for most of us. What has been said of one, is true in measure of all Philosophic Mystics : "It seems as if in ascending Plotinus had drawn up the ladder after him, and left himself no possibility of descending again" (Caird's *Evolution*

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of Theology in the Greek Philosophers, p. 253). Certainly there is no ladder left by which simple souls may ascend. It was only as Mysticism became emancipated from Neo-Platonism, and from Scholasticism, and returned to the earliest sources of Christian thought and life, that it is seen as a simple, yet practical, religion of experience, the life " hid with Christ in God."

And this life is not exceptional, abnormal, but life in its fulness and joy, only to be understood *as it is known*, and never able to be explained or adequately expressed.

" What this opening of the spiritual eye is, the greatest scholar on earth cannot imagine by his wit nor show fully by his tongue ; for it cannot be gotten by study, nor by man's industry alone, but principally by grace of the Holy Ghost, and with human industry " (*The Scale of Perfection*, p. 273).

Accepting this limitation we may consider the two great truths underlying the soul's vital experience of God.

(1) *Of God*.—The testimony of the Mystics as to the nature of God can be summed up in the two great sayings : " God is Spirit " ; " God is Love." How these are known must be evident from the very nature of the religious experience. God is known in direct fellowship with the soul, known, that is, as Spirit, by the spirit which man is. God is known as Love, by the love which alone brings the soul

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into fellowship with Him, and by the Grace of Condescension which makes such fellowship with sinful man possible.

It would be easy to find in the writings of all the Christian Mystics glowing sentences in which these truths of God are declared. I have already given some extracts enforcing the human side of this truth—that love alone knows God. The ground of this love is seen in God Himself. “Contemplation is a wonderful joy of God’s love” (*Rolle*). God is “The Living Fountain of Goodness” (*Catherine of Genoa*). Richard of St. Victor writes thus :

“In this state a man’s soul feeleth God so sweet, so merciful, so good, so courteous, so true, and so kind, so faithful, so lovely, and so homely, that he leaveth nothing in him that he offereth not it clearly, freely, and homely unto Him” (*The Cell of Self-knowledge*, p. 11).

Such joy in God, so rich and full, can only be in God as Love. Reference has already been made to the danger of so pressing the love-symbols of Marriage, and of the Bride and Bridegroom, as to repel, rather than inspire devotion. There is a corresponding danger of thinking and speaking of Divine Love as weak and sentimental. But deep religious experience saves from this error.

The vision of God brings true self-knowledge. This is emphasised by many of the Mystics. Thus, Richard of St. Victor writes :

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“ When a soul, by the grace of God and long travail, is come to feeling of ghostly joy in God, then it feeleth that sin hath been the cause of the delaying thereof ” (p. 22). “ When thou feelest continually thine heart desire after the love of God, then, by the light of His grace that He sendeth in thy reason, thou mayest see both thine own unworthiness and His great goodness ” (p. 30).

Further evidence of this truth is found in the stern rebukes of “ the sin of presumption,” and of all spiritual pride and self-righteousness, and in the demand for humility before God, in which all Mystical Guides unite. To claim any good as of self “ toucheth God in His honour.” This is the spirit throughout of the *Theologia Germanica*, and of the *Imitation*. Indeed the grace of humility is pressed so urgently, that it has seemed to some an unmanning of the self, a self-abasement altogether too abject.

But this is to do these great souls grave injustice, and to miss altogether the deep significance of their teaching. It is the intense, even passionate realisation of the Love of God, which inspires and compels humility before God. All must be read in the spirit of a prayer so tender and trustful as this :

“ Blessed be Thou my God ; for although I be unworthy of any benefits : yet Thy nobleness and infinite kindness never ceases to do good even to the ungrateful and to those who are turned away far from Thee. Turn Thou us unto Thee, that we may

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be thankful, humble and devout ; for Thou art our salvation, our courage and our strength ” (*Imitation*, Bk. IV., Ch. VIII.).

One further testimony must be given, and again from one of our own English Mystics. Amongst the re-issues of the books of the Mystics, that of the *Revelation of Divine Love, Recorded by Julian, Anchoress at Norwich, A.D. 1373*, is especially welcome. Little is known of the outer life of the Lady Julian. She speaks of herself as “ a simple creature, that cowde no letter ” (unskilled in letters), and if we are to understand that she was an uneducated woman, then she is a truly remarkable illustration of “ the genius ” to which reference has previously been made. She certainly was a literary genius, with a rare gift of expression. Her *Revelation* is the story of the Answers to her three desires, and especially to the third, which she tells us was “ a mighty desire to receive three wounds in my life : that is to say, the wound of very contrition, the wound of kind compassion, and the wound of steadfast longing towards God ” (p. 5).

Her vision of the Love which God is was that of Fatherhood, and even more remarkable, of Motherhood.

“ As verily as God is our Father, so verily God is our Mother ; and that showed He in all, and especially in these sweet words where He saith :

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I it am. That is to say, I it am, the Might and the Goodness of the Fatherhood ; I it am, the Wisdom of the Motherhood ; I it am, the Light and the Grace that is all blessed Love ; I it am, the Trinity ; I it am, the Unity : I am the sovereign Goodness of all manner of things. I am that maketh thee to love : I am that maketh thee to long : I it am, the endless fulfilling of all true desires ” (p. 147).

One other passage must be given, the closing one of her book :

“ And I saw full surely that ere God made us He loved us ; which love was never slacked, nor ever shall be. And in this love He hath done all His works ; and in this love He hath made all things profitable to us ; and in this love our life is everlasting. In our making we had beginning ; but the love wherein He made us was in Him from without beginning : in which love we have our beginning. And all this shall we see in God, without end ” (p. 203).

What the vision meant to the Lady Julian is seen, I think, in this hope, in the expression of which she anticipates the faith which holds the heart of many in our day, and which is grounded in the vision of the Holy Love of God : “ Thus I understood that all His blessed children which be come out of Him by Nature shall be brought again into Him by Grace ” (p. 159).

(2) *Of the Soul.*—If the vision of God brings with it true self-knowledge, “ beholding His greatness we

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are struck by our own baseness, His purity shows our foulness, and by meditating on His humility we find how very far we are from being humble" (*The Interior Castle*, p. 18), yet this self-abasement is but one result. True self-exaltation also follows, for the worth and dignity of the soul are revealed. The soul that is of worth to God must also be of worth to itself, and the measure of God's regard declares that worth.

The discovery of God's Presence in the Soul is the mystic secret. "Why do I pray that Thou shouldest enter into me, seeing that I also am? For I should not be, if Thou wert not in me"—so St. Augustine writes. It is the re-discovery of the Apostolic faith: "Ye are a sanctuary of God; and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." The doctrine of the Immanence of God is taught by all Mystics. In Philosophic Mysticism this essential truth passes almost if not wholly into Pantheism, but in Religious Mysticism it is a truth of experience.

Eckhart, in whom the speculative and deeply religious elements were remarkably combined, in his sermon on "The Nearness of the Kingdom," says: "I am as sure as I live that nothing is so near to me as God. God is nearer to me than I am to myself; my existence depends on the nearness and presence of God," and to *know* this nearness of God is our happiness. In another sermon he

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declares: "There is a somewhat in the soul that is, as it were, a blood relative of God."

Tauler speaks of "the unseen depths of the spirit where lies the image of God," and declares: "He is much nearer than anything is to itself in the depths of the heart."

Rusybroeck taught that "the soul finds God in its own depths." St. John of the Cross wrote: "In every soul, even that of the greatest sinner in the world, God dwells, and is substantially present."

It is unnecessary to press the matter further. Freed from philosophic terms and scholastic speculation, the truth of Mysticism is the simple yet profound truth of Scripture. Man is the Image, the Offspring, the Son of God, and to restore and perfect the lost image, and to draw back the wandering sons to the Father is the place and power of Christ. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."

"The direct access of the soul to God—the direct access of God to the soul," this, which has been declared to be "the ultimate principle of Protestantism," is the first-hand experience of the Religious Mystics. To them this was no mere "principle"—it was the life of their life. For them, conversion was in truth "the solitary disclosure of God to the Soul."

Enough has not been made of this experience,

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which is by no means limited to the past. It is a vital experience to-day, though far less notably so than all devout souls wish. I press the point: Conversion is essentially mystical, and true Mysticism is found in every genuine conversion.

The author of *Mysticism*, as it appears to me, has a very inadequate idea of what the Evangelical Churches, at least, mean by conversion. She defines "religious conversion as ordinarily understood" thus: "the sudden and emotional acceptance of theological beliefs which the self had previously either rejected or treated as conventions dwelling upon the margin of consciousness and having no meaning for her actual life" (p. 213).

As known to many of us, conversion is not necessarily sudden, and it is always moral. It is often an epitome of the "Mystic Way." There is a gradual detachment from old ways, a greater thoughtfulness, with times of serious self-questioning. The thought of God and of His Will becomes persistent. Memories of Christ are revived. Often there is severe inward conflict, the sense of past wrong-doing, and the secret longing for deliverance. At last light breaks, God speaks, and the will is yielded to His obedience, and in that experience God is known, His Presence is a reality, and life is changed.

This experience is repeated upon higher planes

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of life and thought. Now the turning away is from the pride of intellect, or from self-satisfaction in spiritual things. The Vision of Christ is fuller, deeper. The contemplation of God is more profound. God and the soul, the soul and God, ever in closer fellowship, in living, personal union, knowing and known—this is the mystic consciousness.

CHAPTER VI

THE SEAT OF AUTHORITY

THE great truths of Mysticism are, as we have seen, two, of God, and of the soul. Other truths are discussed by the Mystics, and many startling theories are propounded—doctrines of Sin, of the Soul's essential nature and destiny, of the nature of God Himself, and of the Universe. But these do not arise necessarily out of, or belong essentially to, the religious experience. They belong to the speculative element in Mysticism. The Divine in Man, and the Human in God, the true kinship of man and God, the discovery of and communion with God in the secret life within—this it is which is given in religious experience.

Out of this experience arises the doctrine of the “Inner Light,” its reality and its authority. Here we touch the danger zone of Mysticism. To many it has seemed that Mysticism is but another name for “Subjectivism.” In the very measure of the brightness of the “Inner Light” must be the impulse to reject all external aids to, and authority in, matters of faith. The strong emphasis which is laid upon humility is not without its special need.

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The testimony of experience is that God dwells “with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit.”

This danger has been strongly emphasised by Herrmann in his deeply religious book : *The Communion of the Christian with God*. To him the piety of Mysticism is :

“ When the influence of God upon the soul is sought and found *solely* in an inward experience of the individual ; when certain excitements of the emotions are taken, *with no further question*, as evidence that the soul is possessed by God ; when, at the same time, *nothing external to the soul* is consciously and clearly perceived and firmly grasped.”

I have emphasised the qualifying words upon which the whole of his assumption rests. He grants all for which we contend when he says : “ The Mystic seeks God in his own inner life. In this he is indeed not altogether wrong. For we never find God until He rules in our inner life.” But Herrmann will not admit that this is Mysticism in and of itself ; to complete the idea there must be the minimising, even to rejection, of all external authority. Hence he can say : “ Mysticism is not that which is common to all religion, but a particular species of religion, namely, a piety which feels that which is historical in the positive religion to be burdensome and so rejects it.” In his earnest desire to exalt the historical Person of Jesus,

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he seems to go to the opposite extreme and to deny to experimental religion its true place and power.

What are the facts? Do the Christian Mystics limit all Divine Revelation to the "Inner Light," rejecting all historical religion, and refusing guidance from external sources? Were this the case then it would be no wonder that devout men should leave the Mystics severely alone. Wesley's well-known objection to the mystical writers is based largely upon this misunderstanding. "I think," he wrote in 1736, "the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the Mystics—under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace" (*Life and Times of Wesley*, Vol. I., p. 133). His own mystic experience, "second conversion" it is often named, two years later, when for the first time he experienced religion in its fulness of conviction and of joy, ought to have changed his attitude; but so late as 1764 he returned to the attack. After reading a *Defence of the Mystic Writers* he formulated his objections: to their sentiments—their spirit—and their whole phraseology. We can only conclude that Wesley's acquaintance with the Mystics was very limited. It is evident that Jacob Boehme is most in his mind, for he concludes: "St. John speaks as high and as deep things as Jacob Behmen.

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Why then does not Jacob speak as plain as he?"
(Vol. II., p. 521.)

For the understanding of the subject before us, two considerations must be held in mind. *First*, that there is no pure, unmixed experience, uninfluenced by anything outside itself, just as there is no self-realisation except under the influence of other selves. *Second*—that all vital knowledge of God must be direct Self-revelation, not otherwise can it carry conviction as of God. In the final issue the seat of Authority, for each soul *for itself*, must be within. No outer revelation can be received unless it is authenticated within, and, unless received within, it must remain inoperative.

"All the great works and wonders that God has ever wrought or shall ever work in or through the creatures, or even God Himself with all His goodness, so far as these things exist or are done outside of me, can never make me blessed, but only in so far as they exist and are done and loved, known, tasted and felt within me" (*Theologia Germanica*, p. 28).

It is a simple truism to say that we receive only what we *can* receive. Every nature is the measure of its own receptivity. This is not to make the individual the measure of the truth, but he is *his own measure* as to what of truth *he* can receive. There must be "an inner witness" if any external voice is to carry conviction. The Word of God Him-

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self, whether as contained in the Bible, or as spoken by living voices, must speak to this "inner witness" if it is to be verily God's Word. This truth the Prophets knew. They spoke with conviction, out of their own souls, hoping to evoke, not override, the moral sense of their hearers. "Come now let us reason together"—is the Divine note. So our Lord Himself appealed to those whom He addressed. "How think ye—What think ye—Why of yourselves judge ye not what is right."

The true relation of the outward and inward voices has been clearly stated by Coleridge :

"As much of reality, as much of objective truth, as the Scriptures communicate to the subjective experiences of the Believer, so much of present life, of living and effective import do these experiences give to the letter of the Scriptures. In the one, *the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit*, that we have received the *spirit of adoption*; in the other our spirit bears witness to the power of the Word, that it is indeed the Spirit that proceedeth from God" (*Confessions—Letter VII.*).

We return to our question—What are the facts ? Do the Mystics as such " slight the means of grace " ?

(1) They were devout and loyal sons and daughters of their Church, fulfilling all her rites, and subjecting themselves in all outward duties to her discipline. This is the surprising fact. We expect to find a breaking away from formal religion corre-

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sponding to the inward realisation of vital, personal religion. It was not so. No doubt there are exceptions. There are extravagances of Mysticism, and something worse. But, speaking generally, the great Mystics of the Middle Ages did not deprecate external obligations or disregard the doctrines of their Church. Holding the essential Protestant faith of direct personal fellowship with God, they were in no sense "Protestants."

There is no need to adduce evidence. Indeed the fact that mystical writings are so permeated with Roman Catholic ideas and rites has proved a stumbling-block in the way of their appreciation by the devout of other Churches. The enlargement of ideas and widening of sympathies which is in process, and which, in part at least, accounts for the new awakening of interest in Mysticism, will minimise this objection.

But this must be said—these outward forms of religion are not *essential* elements in Mysticism. The proof of this is seen in The Society of Friends :

"A religious body which has made a serious attempt to unite inward, mystical religion with active, social endeavours, and to maintain a religious fellowship without a rigid ecclesiastical system, and with large scope for personal initiative, immediate revelation and individual responsibility" (*Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. xxxviii.).

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(2) Mystics recognise the need for the correction of individual experience by external authority. No man may be a law to himself, in thought or in action. No life is alone. Comparison is necessary, and truth gains added force as it is seen working in other lives.

In the *Life of St. Teresa* it is told again and again how eagerly she sought guidance, and submitted her experience to the judgment of others. And for "her children" she insists that while "experience is necessary throughout, so also is a spiritual Director." For herself she welcomed most those who were "timid about these things," and to them she "laid bare her secrets with the greater joy."

"I hold all truth in suspicion which the authority of the Scriptures does not confirm," writes Richard of St. Victor. Telling of the three means that bring a soul to contemplation, Walter Hilton includes "reading of Holy Scripture and good books." One of the joys of the contemplative life, he says, is "to see Jesus in the Scriptures after the opening of the spiritual eye."

It is, I think, in the writings of St. John of the Cross, who might be cited as one of the most exclusive and self-centred of the Mystics, that the need of fellowship with others in the faith is most strikingly taught. Quoting a well-known passage, he writes, paraphrasing the thought :

"Where two or three meet together, to consider what is for the greater glory and honour of My

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name, there am I in the midst of them, enlightening them, and confirming the truths of God in their hearts. Remember, He does not say: Where one is, but where two are, at the least. He would have us know that it is not His will that anyone should, trusting to himself, rely on the divine communications; and that He will not establish us therein without the authority and direction of the Church or His Ministers. God will not enlighten him who is alone, nor confirm the truth in his heart: such an one will be weak and cold" (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 189).

(3) The place of Jesus Christ in mystical experience. In view of the criticism of Herrmann, and of his express statement that the Mystic in finding God "has left Christ behind," the question of the relation of Christ to mystical experience is supremely important. In Christ we have the Highest Authority, and for any religious experience which is to be called Christian His place must be pre-eminent.

Here, again, we turn to the words of the Mystics themselves. St. John of the Cross writes:

"We must abide in the teaching of Christ, all beside is nothing, and not to be believed, unless it be in harmony therewith" (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 186). "God hath now so spoken, that nothing remains unspoken; for that which He partially revealed to the prophets He hath now revealed wholly in Him, giving unto us all, that is, His Son" (p. 184). "If thou desirest to learn of God secret things, fix thine eyes upon Christ, and

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thou wilt find the profoundest mysteries, the wisdom and marvels of God, hidden in Him" (p. 185).

Even Eckhart, "who more than any other of the German Mystics gives himself to abstract speculation," has this direction: "If the Divine Nature be beyond your comprehension, believe simply on Christ; follow His holy example, and remain steadfast." And for himself, he says:

"If I should remain entombed in flesh till the judgment day and suffer the pains of hell, that would be for me a small thing to bear for my beloved Lord Jesus Christ, if I had the certainty at last of not being separated from Him. While I am here, He is in me; after this life, I am in Him. All things are therefore possible to me, if I am united to Him who can do all things" (*Sermons*, p. 37).

The testimony given under these three heads might be added to almost indefinitely, but what has been given will, I think, suffice to justify the assertion that Christian Mysticism does not include the rejection or the depreciation of external religion. The mystic experience is of a deep and vital spiritual life, the discovery of God within, and the communion of the Soul with God, a knowledge of God and communion with God as revealed in and through Jesus Christ, so that the Gospel Story is bound up inseparably with the religious experience.

Nor must we omit from thought the natural fellowship of kindred minds which instinctively

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draws into close sympathy those who share the same experience. There is abundant evidence that the Mystics, generally, read and carefully studied the writings of those who had lived the life before them, and even in the few cases where there is little evidence of this, yet the very fact that these secluded Mystics should have recorded their experience shows that they were not mere isolated units—they wrote for the guidance of those who they knew desired their help. In this fellowship one with another we seem to be witnessing the re-birth of the great Christian faith of “The Communion of Saints.” Indeed, whatever their own Church life, the devout Mystics reveal, and sometimes even consciously realise, that in this fellowship of spiritual life is the true Unity of the Body of Christ. And this is our hope for our own day. More and more is it seen that outward uniformity and intellectual agreement cannot be looked for. It is for “the Unity of the Spirit” we pray. And this unity already exists among all those who have discovered God in their souls and are dealing directly with Him.

CHAPTER VII

MYSTICAL INTERPRETATION

THE distinction between Mysticism considered as a vital religious experience and Mysticism as a principle of interpretation is of the greatest importance. There is a certain fascination in a thorough-going doctrine of Symbolism, and most of all when, to the seeing eye, "all things are full of God." The Nature Symbolism of our great Poets is beautiful and helpful. The tender reverence for Nature of St. Francis of Assisi, who could speak of "my little sisters the birds," is delightful. The Lady Julian wrote: "After this I saw God in a Point, that is to say in mine understanding—by which sight I saw that He is in all things." Even the author of *Theologia Germanica* can say: "The creatures are a guide and a path unto God and Eternity. This world is an outer court of Eternity." There is, however, one essential condition of this vision of God in all things: the spiritual eye must be opened, God must be known first of all *within*, in the soul itself, not otherwise will He be found in Nature. This is ever the witness of Religious Mysticism.

This principle is of special force in the interpreta-

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tion of Scripture. To the soul that knows God and waits upon His Word, symbols of His thought are found everywhere ; all Holy Scripture is full of God. But it is quite possible to hold a doctrine of interpretation, and to be able to elaborate and apply its rules, without any first-hand knowledge of God Himself. There is a danger of Mysticism degenerating into *mere* Symbolism, and delight in mystic meanings taking the place of religious experience. Indeed not a little of the " spiritual interpretation of Scripture " has been prompted by the exigencies of Apologetics, rather than by the insight of experience.

This is true, in great measure, of Origen, the prince of Allegorists. His was the serious task of meeting opponents, and refuting their objections to the Hebrew Scriptures as of Divine origin and authority. He laid down the doctrine that " as man consists of body and soul and spirit, so in the same way does Scripture," which has a literal, a moral, and a mystical significance. In his Homilies on *Exodus* he declares that " not one iota or one tittle is without mysteries." All is precious—every minute detail, incident, turn of expression, name, number. " For those who can understand " there is a spiritual sense in everything. Some passages, he held, " do not at all contain the corporeal sense." In illustration, he instances the vessels of water for

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purification, containing two or three firkins apiece—“darkly intimating that the Jews are purified by the word of Scripture, receiving sometimes two firkins, *i.e.*, so to speak, the ‘psychical’ and ‘spiritual’ sense; and sometimes three firkins, since some have in addition to those already mentioned also the ‘corporeal’ sense, which is capable of edification.”

Origen finds the justification of his method in the writings of St. Paul, and no doubt the Apostle’s Rabbinical training does colour his thought at times, though in his Epistles allegory holds a very subordinate place. It is but “the turn of a metaphor, or the character of an illustration, or the form of an argument,” and can hardly be used in support of a thorough-going system of allegorical interpretation. “The object of the Spirit,” so Origen believed, was the enumeration “of ineffable mysteries,” in order that “he who is capable of instruction may by investigation, and by devoting himself to the study of the profundities of meaning contained in the words, become a participator of all the doctrines of His Counsel.” This introduces into Divine Revelation the definite purpose of concealment, and exalts the “esoteric” into a Divine grace. The very basis of allegorism is in the assumed Divine intention to “conceal from the multitude the deeper meaning” of Scripture.

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Through Origen, the principle of mystical interpretation became established in Christian thought, and, as we should expect, it entered very largely into the writings of the Mystics. The surprise, I think, is that it did not enter more largely. Allowance, however, has to be made for unfamiliarity with the Bible. Before the age of printing, copies of the Scriptures must have been comparatively rare, and before the age of translations into the vernacular, the Bible was a sealed book to many.

St. Teresa tells us that she "scarcely understood a word of Latin." In her writings there are very few Scripture references. Their charm lies in her directness of speech, "illustrated by so nice and homely examples." Her parable of the watered garden is rich in suggestiveness. It is given in her *Life*, written by herself. "A beginner must look upon himself as making a garden, wherein our Lord may take His delight, but in a soil unfruitful, and abounding in weeds." The Lord roots up the weeds, and plants good herbs.

"We have, as good gardeners, by the help of God, to see that the plants grow, to water them carefully that they may not die, but produce blossoms which shall send forth much fragrance. . . . It seems to me that the garden may be watered in four ways: by water taken out of a well, which is very laborious; or with water raised by means of an engine and buckets, drawn by a windlass—I have drawn it this way sometimes—it is a less troublesome way than

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the first, and gives more water ; or by a stream or brook, whereby the garden is watered in a much better way . . . or by showers of rain when our Lord Himself waters it." [She then proceeds to give "the application of these four ways of irrigation by which the garden is to be maintained"] (p. 81).

This use of natural imagery runs through her books, but of allegorising there is little or nothing. Of course—for this contrast belongs to the subject—there is the usual reference to Martha and Mary, as types of the Active and Contemplative lives. Here again her woman's wit serves her well. She writes :

" St. Martha was holy, though we are never told she was a contemplative ; would you not be content with resembling this blessed woman, who deserved to receive Christ our Lord so often into her home ? . . . Remember that some one must cook the food, and think yourself favoured in being allowed to serve with Martha " (*The Way of Perfection*, p. 110).

In another place, indeed in more than one, she speaks of the contemplative and active life combined—" thus Martha and Mary toil together."

In St. John of the Cross we meet another type of mind. He is the scholar, the student, and to him the Bible was a well-known book. In the Index of Scripture texts in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* there are over 200 Old Testament passages given, and 150 New Testament. In that of the *Spiritual Canticle*, there are about 200 references—excluding the passages from *The Song of Solomon*, upon which the

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book is based. Reference has already been made to this book. It seems as if it were only in the ecstatic emotions of this love-song that the Mystics could find adequate symbols of their own spiritual love.

For the most part the applications of Scripture in the writings of St. John of the Cross, are direct and apt. There are occasional "mystical interpretations." "'He sendeth His crystals'—that is contemplation—'like morsels'—these morsels of dim contemplation." "'At the brightness that was before Him the clouds passed'—that is, between Him and our understanding." "These are they—the soul's lower operations, passions, and desires—of whom our Saviour said in the holy Gospel, 'A man's enemies shall be they of his own household.' " The ladder of Jacob's dream shadows forth "the ladder of contemplation." This symbol is frequently used in mystical writings. In his use of it, the ladder has ten steps. The creeping things and abominations which Ezekiel saw, in his vision, painted on the walls of the Temple are "the thoughts and conceptions of the intellect derived from the vile things of earth, which defile the Temple of the Soul." Often his spiritualisings are apt and suggestive. "Why do you spend money, of self-will, for that which is not bread, that is, the Spirit of God." Of the longing of the soul for God, he writes :

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“ So oppressive is this thirst of the soul, that it counts it as nothing to break through the camp of the Philistines, like the valiant men of David, to fill its pitcher with ‘ water out of the cisterns of Bethlehem ’ which is Christ.” “ ‘ Let your loins be girt ’—the loins are the desires.”

Christ is the “ Treasure hidden in the Soul.” The command to enter the inner chamber and shut the door is a command to “ enter within thyself ” and shut the door “ of the soul,” or as Richard Rolle has it—“ call thine heart home, and hold thy wits in there, that none go out.”

There is one great Mystical Book which runs an allegorisation of a Bible story through all its parts : I refer to the treatise *Benjamin Minor*, by Richard of St. Victor. Following the reading of the Vulgate : “ This is Benjamin, a youth, in ecstasy of mind,” this son of Jacob is taken as the type of contemplation. The whole scale of perfection is worked out under the characters of Jacob, his wives, and his children. “ By Jacob is understanden God, by Rachel reason, by Leah affection,” and so on through the whole family story.

What, then, is to be our attitude to the mystical interpretation of Scripture ?

(i) It must be admitted that the Bible is essentially a mystical book. As a book of religion, telling the story of how men found God, and how God found and inspired men, it could not well be other.

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It must also be granted that there are special and remarkable mystical experiences told of many of the great leaders of religion. The whole story of Moses is full of these. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and most of the Prophets had their "vision." And in the Christian Scriptures there are incidents and experiences of a like character. The conversion of St. Paul, and his trance visions, and St. Peter's experience at Joppa, may be cited in evidence. Then, too, there are many passages in these writings of the finest spiritual Mysticism ; not in the Fourth Gospel alone, but also in the other three, and not by any means in the writings of St. John alone, but also and, I think, in richer significance, in those of St. Paul.

But all this may be freely and gladly admitted without going to the extreme of asserting, as some do, that the Bible is mystical throughout, and that deep spiritual meanings are to be found in any and every part. To count the whole of the New Testament as mystical in intention is to rob the supreme mystical passages therein of their special force and value. By reducing all to a common level, the rare wine of the richest Mysticism is sadly diluted. Indeed this is to set aside all ideas of historical interpretation, and to bring us back again to the old error of the "equal and level" theory of the Bible, and an altogether impossible doctrine of

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Inspiration and of Revelation. It is a return to the standpoint of Origen, without his excuse, compelling us to say, with the late Dean Burdon :

“ The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the Throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it (where are we to stop ?), every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High ” (*Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 89).

To affirm that *all in the Bible* is thus the very Word of God, and charged with Divine significance, is to affirm that there is no Word of God which we need to consider, and no Divine message of any practical use to us. A chain is ever the strength of its *weakest link*.

(2) But further than this, and if possible worse, the doctrine of the mystical interpretation of all sacred writings reduces to one level all religious writings, all Scriptures. The “ enlightened ” can discover the profoundest truths in all. To them the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, especially as it is rendered in “ The Song Celestial,” is as the Fourth Gospel. The whole of mystical theology is found therein. Esoteric Buddhism becomes as rich and fruitful as Christianity itself. Of course, the form of these writings is different, and a certain superiority of the Christian Scriptures will be admitted, but to the “ initiated ” their essential value is the same. Now all this is

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to shut the eyes to the witness of History. As a simple matter of fact, the Scriptures of the World have not wrought the same righteousness of life either in nations, or in individual lives. God has not been known in the same fulness, nor has communion with Him been experienced in the same peace and gladness of heart, by the devout of all religions. The ultimate test remains: " by their fruits ye shall know them."

(3) This principle of interpretation tends, in great measure, to the denial of the historical in Religion. This was felt by Origen, and he guards himself against the possible charge.

" But that no one may suppose that we assert respecting the whole that no history is real because a certain one is not ; and that no law is to be literally observed, because a certain one according to the letter is absurd or impossible ; or that the statements regarding the Saviour are not true in a manner perceptible to the senses ; or that no commandment and precept of His ought to be obeyed ; we have to answer that, with regard to certain things, it is perfectly clear to us that the historical account is true." . . . " The passages that are true in their historical meaning are much more numerous than those which are interspersed with a purely spiritual signification " (*De Principiis*, Bk. IV., Ch. I).

The tendency to ignore or deny the historical, under the assumption of enlightened Mysticism, is not wholly unknown in our own day. We find

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evidence of it in the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. The writer of this Gospel confessedly uses his material for definite spiritual instruction. The miracles of Jesus are thought of as "Signs." Yes, it is said, they are Parables in the form of stories of action, and have spiritual meanings only. I am not now discussing the question of the *fact* of the Miracles, neither do I doubt the mystic significance of many miracles. What I urge is that the presumed incompatibility between Mystical and Historical is false and misleading; even if it were admitted that the Fourth Gospel is mystical throughout, yet the question of the historical truth of the facts and incidents used by the writer is not settled. It is still open to say that the writer, in fulfilment of his purpose and for the enforcement and embodiment of his ideas, makes use of historical facts and not of mere imaginative pictures. The *facts* of Nature are not denied in Nature Mysticism. It is a sense of the meaning, thought, idea behind the outward that is felt. Assuming that the Divine Life is lived under human conditions, such a life must surely, in all its activities, be rich in the expression of mystical experience, richer far than any imaginatively created mystical stories.

(4) The principle of mystical interpretation carries the fatal doctrine of the esoteric in religion. The Scriptures, on this theory, were written by

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“initiates” for the initiated. In one sense this must be true; “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” But there is a radical difference between these initiations. The Apostle’s doctrine is that of all religious experience: “The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way.” The doctrine of Symbol Mysticism is: “By wisdom is God known.” Such Mysticism is “for the educated and developed.” “For the uninstructed and undeveloped the Church must continue to speak with veiled face, in parable and symbol.” This is the “note” of the *occult*, rather than of Mysticism. In Christianity it is a discordant note.

The doctrine that the Bible is first of all and mainly a religious Book is entirely right and good. It is for this very reason that it appeals to simple souls who know and experience vital religion. And this is the true attitude of the Mystics, and their united witness. The richest mystical experience may be, often has been, enjoyed by the lowly and uncultured. “Born of the Spirit,” spiritual things are their highest good. Untrained in mental exercises they are yet “rich in faith.” To them has been given to know the secret wisdom of God. In their experience has been fulfilled the saying of the Greatest

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Mystic : " I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." " Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

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CHAPTER VIII

PRACTICAL MYSTICISM

A MYSTIC, in the thought of many, is an impractical dreamer rejoicing, it may be, in the indulgence of his own emotions, but of no service to anybody else.

Let it be at once admitted that this judgment is not wholly baseless. In mystical writings the affections and activities of ordinary life are so utterly contemned, and the call to complete detachment from all external realities is so absolute, that readers are not altogether without excuse for their misunderstanding.

To some minds even the *Imitation* is positively distasteful. Ardent lovers of the book have to admit that, on its negative side, it is

“ false in emphasis and, more than that, false to the facts of experience and reality. This picture of the worthlessness of the finite, the vanity of all that is, is untrue and impossible. Taken consistently, it cuts the nerve of spiritual effort, and destroys all faith in the significance of earthly life with its myriad moral issues. It turns the gaze away from the very stuff out of which moral and spiritual fibre is to be woven.” “ The eternal thing in the book is its calm and compelling revelation of the reality of the

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spiritual Kingdom, and its complete sufficiency for the soul" (*Mystical Religion*, pp. 326—7).

Milman's criticism that it "begins in self and terminates in self," has been refuted at some length by Mr. Montmorency in his *Thomas à Kempis, his Age and Book*. We agree that in one sentence, which by no means stands alone, this criticism is refuted. "If thou wilt be carried: carry also another"—to which we may add this saying: "If thy heart were right then every creature would be a mirror of life, and a book of holy doctrine to thee." The prayer of Jesus for His disciples: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil," gives the true life-principle—*in* the world but not *of* the world. This way of life some at least of the Mystics clearly perceived, as I shall hope to illustrate from their writings and from their lives.

In the *teaching* of the Mystics, three directions of thought may be profitably considered. Their thoughts of Nature, of love and service of one another, and of service in relation especially to ecstasy.

(i) *Nature*.—In any full study of Mysticism account must be taken of the symbolism of Nature. Indeed Mysticism itself has been defined in terms of symbolism, "that everything, in being what it is, is symbolic of something more." It is not of this I wish to speak, but of the first-hand experience of

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God. Is there a message of God in Nature ? Are the Mystics, as such, blind—self-blinded it could only be—to the glories of earth and sea and sky ? The answer may be given in the words of Suso : “ O tender God ! if Thou art so loving in Thy creations, how beautiful and delightful must Thou be Thyself.” Nature parables and images abound in the writings of St. Teresa, showing how richly she had fulfilled the command to “ consider the lilies, and behold the birds.” The love of St. Francis for all living creatures as sharers with himself of the Divine life is one of the many attractive qualities in a life full of love and tenderness.

(2) *Love and Service of one another.*—The second great commandment, even as the first, and as necessitated by it, is ever emphasised. Love to our neighbour is part of our love of God. “ What a man takes in by *Contemplation* he must pour out in love ”—so Eckhart taught. He even exalts Martha, “ who has learnt her lesson,” above Mary, “ who is still at school.”

Tauler’s sermons are charged with asceticism. Even the affections of ordinary life are set aside. They were sermons to the *religious*, and due allowance must be made accordingly. But there is another note therein. Thus, when distinguishing between true and false conversion, he says the truly converted are “ kind-hearted to their neighbour ”

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and ever ready to "lend him a helping hand." They are "careful to fill up their time industriously with good and useful undertakings to the glory of God and the good of their neighbours." All aptness for any art of life he counts a gift of God. "If I were not a priest," he says, "but were living as a layman, I should take it as a great favour that I knew how to make shoes, and should try to make them better than anyone else, and would gladly earn my bread by the labour of my hands." He urges that this is the spirit in which all work should be done, "in God with a view to His glory, and the good of his neighbour."

"I will not that thou shouldest ween that all are holy that have the habit of holiness, and are not occupied with the world. Nor that all are ill who discourse of earthly business;" thus Richard Rolle, who also says: "He is ever praying, who is doing good."

In the writings of St. Teresa the second commandment of love is very strongly enforced, and with a special emphasis which sounds quite modern:

"Our Lord asks but two things of us: love for Him and for our neighbour; this is what we must strive to obtain. Let us try to do His will perfectly; then we shall be united to Him. . . . I think the most certain sign that we keep these two commandments is that we have a genuine love for others. We cannot know whether we love God, although

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there may be strong reasons for thinking so, but there can be no doubt about whether we love our neighbour or no" (*The Interior Castle*, p. 117).

(3) *Service and Ecstasy*.—As the inward joy of the life with God is so dwelt upon by the Mystics, we might expect them to teach that nothing should ever be allowed to interrupt this holy fellowship. The hours of devotion, these surely, they will tell us, must be kept sacred for God and the soul alone. Let us hear their own answer :

"Even if a man were in rapture such as Paul experienced, and if he knew of a person who needed something of him, I think it would be far better out of love to leave the rapture and serve the needy man."

This is Eckhart's teaching, and it is followed by others.

Thus Ruysbroeck writes :

"Interior consolation is of an inferior order to the act of love which renders service to the poor. Were you rapt in ecstasy like St. Peter or St. Paul, or whomsoever you will, and heard that some poor person was in want of a hot drink, or other assistance, I should advise you to awake for a moment from your ecstasy to go to prepare the food. Leave God for God ; find Him, serve Him in His members ; you will lose nothing by the exchange" (*Reflections from the Mirror of a Mystic*, p. 54).

The solitary life, he teaches, is not in outward condition, but in spirit, for "none can prevent him who seeks and tastes God in all things, from being

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a solitary amid all multitudes and multiplicities whatsoever." "He lives in the market place as if it were a church or a cell." "The same spirit should accompany a spiritual man everywhere." This also was Eckhart's teaching before him. For them the division of life between the sacred and the secular was altogether unspiritual.

Here, again, the words of St. Teresa are very direct :

"When I see people very anxious to know what sort of prayer they practise, covering their faces and afraid to move or think, lest they should lose what tenderness and devotion they feel, I know how little they understand how to attain union with God, since they think it consists in such things as this. No, my sisters, no ; our Lord expects *works* from us ! If you see a sick sister whom you can relieve, never fear losing your devotion ; compassionate her ; if she is in pain, pity her, and when there is need, fast so that she may eat, not so much for her sake, as because you know your Lord asks it of you. This is the true union of our will with that of God. . . . Beg of our Lord to grant you perfect love for your neighbour and leave the rest to Him. . . . Forget your self-interests for theirs, however much nature may rebel ; when there is an opportunity, take some burden upon yourself to ease your neighbour of it" (*The Interior Castle*, p. 119).

That there are serious omissions in the teaching of the Mystics is indeed true. To them the very idea of the Kingdom of God as a social regeneration was an impossible conception, so intent were they upon

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proclaiming the Kingdom of God within. The tendency of religious thought in our own time is in the opposite direction ; so intent are we upon the regeneration of *social* life that we are in danger of undervaluing its essential condition, the regeneration of the soul itself. One fact should be remembered, a fact full of significance for our Christian teachers to-day. All their compassion was inspired by the thought and spiritual realisation of the sufferings of Christ. This is strikingly illustrated in Margery Kempe of Lynn, of whom it is said :

“ When she saw the Crucifix, or if she saw a man had a wound, or a beast, or if a man beat a child before her, or smote a horse or another beast with a whip, if she might see it or hear it, she thought she saw our Lord beaten or wounded, like as she saw in the man or in the beast ” (*The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, p. 54).

“ And then I saw that each kind compassion that man hath on his even-Christians with charity, it is Christ in him. . . . He suffereth *with us*.”

So wrote Julian, Anchoress at Norwich.

The teaching of the Mystics is, in a very true sense, practical, and in life they fulfilled their own words. They were deeply in earnest, seeking the true well-being of all. Why else did they write their books ? It was the desire to help others into and along the Way that moved them to tell the story of their own religious experience.

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Even in their “calling,” all were not priests, or monks. Many were simple laymen, engaged in common toil. Such, for the most part, were “The Friends of God,” who “formed small groups, or local societies, gathered about some spiritual leader or counsellor.” Tauler, himself one of these leaders, says : “ I know a man who has the closest walk with God of any I ever saw, and who has been all his life a husbandman—for more than forty years, and is so still.”

Baron von Hügel writes of St. Catherine of Genoa as, “ amongst formally canonised Saints, a rare example of a contemplative and Mystic who, from first to last, leads at the same time the common life of marriage and of widowhood in the world ” (*The Mystical Element of Religion*, I., p. 248).

The story of her activities is remarkable. “ For eleven years she worked among the sick as but one of their many nurses.” Throughout this period “ she never was without the consciousness of her tender Love, nor again did she, because of this consciousness, fail in any practical matter concerning the Hospital.” Later she was appointed Matron of the whole institution. “ During the six years in which she held this office, she had much administrative business and responsibility weighing upon her. Large sums of money passed through her hands, and she always managed to spend and account for them with the

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greatest care and success" (I., p. 143). During the great Plague of 1493 she was untiring in her devotion. She organised tent wards, appointed doctors, nurses, priests and attendants. "Throughout the weeks and months of the visitation she was daily in their midst, superintending, ordering, stimulating, steady-ing, consoling, strengthening this vast crowd of panic-stricken poor and severely strained workers" (I., p. 144).

But the Mystics who may be said to have devoted themselves wholly to the Contemplative life were not inactive. The story of many of them is that of toilsome labour in the service of the Church, and of religion. Many of them were evangelists, in the literal sense of the term, and some also in the ordinary meaning of that term.

A notable example is found in Gerard Groote, styled by his contemporaries "the first father of our Reformation" and "founder of all our modern devotion." His first awakening was through the instrumentality of an unknown, unnamed "Friend of God," who whispered to him: "Why standest thou here?—thou oughtest to become *another man*." Later, with his heart on fire, he went forth to preach the love of God, and such was the general awak-en-ing, that had he not been silenced by the Church authorities, Luther's great work might have been his.

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As it was he founded the new order of "The Brethren of the Common Life."

"The members took no permanent vows, they mingled freely in the world for purposes of service, and lived from their manual labour (copying and beautifying manuscripts) without any resort to begging. They wore a simple grey garb and followed a very simple manner of life—it was an effort to make daily life spiritual. Their emphasis was on *practice* rather than on contemplation. The most visible social service which came from the movement was the impetus it gave to practical education, in which direction Gerard was the prime mover. Through his brotherhoods he provided not only copies of the Scriptures and other holy books for the people, but what was still more important, he provided for the instruction of the common people, especially the children. His *brothers* gave free teaching in their communities to the poorer people, teaching them to read and write, and creating in their minds an appreciation of the real meaning of their religion" (*Mystical Religion*, p. 320).

The influence of Gerard the Great was far-reaching. In his book, *The Founders of the New Devotion*, Thomas à Kempis speaks of himself as "first launched for the services of God, and in the fulness of time steered to the haven of the monastery"—by "Florentius, that Reverend Father of pious memory, Priest of the Church of Deventer, and once a disciple of that Master Gerard of whom I have told above." The fellowship was more than is thus indicated; it was one of spiritual sympathy, as his Life of Gerard shows. Indeed Dr. Rufus Jones goes

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so far as to say that Gerard is the "true spiritual father of the author of the *Imitation*."

Reference has been made to education, and much might be added. In Germany it was the Mystics who founded schools. Because of his great work as a teacher of poor children, Gerson gained for himself the title of "Doctor of the people, and Doctor of little children." It was thus that the Mystics prepared the way in Germany and the Low Countries for the revival of letters, art and science.

It is impossible, within our limits, to complete the tale. The story of four of the great Mystics is one of active devotion to the reform of religion. The great work which St. Catherine of Siena set herself was to restore the spiritual power to the Church. St. Ignatius was the founder of the Society of Jesus, a Missionary Society in its first great purpose. St. Teresa was the great reformer of her Order of Carmelites, infusing new life therein. In this work she had the help of her disciple, St. John of the Cross.

It is needless to press the case further. The charge of mere dreamery will not bear investigation. In the measure of the vitality of religious experience, a life of service must flow therefrom.

"Far from being the unpractical, dreamy persons they are too often conceived to have been, they have weathered storms, endured conflicts, and lived through water-spouts which would have overwhelmed souls whose anchor did not reach beyond

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the veil. They have discovered an inner refuge, where they enjoy the truce of God, even amid the din of the world's warfare. They have led great reforms, championed movements of great moment to humanity, and they have saved Christianity from being submerged under scholastic formalism and ecclesiastical systems, which were alien to man's essential need and nature" (*Mystical Religion*, p. xxx.).

CHAPTER IX

A TYPICAL MYSTIC

I HAVE purposely refrained from giving lengthy quotations from the writings of Walter Hilton, so that I might be free to devote one chapter entirely to this great English Mystic and to illustrate more fully from his teaching some of the questions considered.

But little is known of his active life, beyond the fact that he was a Canon of Thurgarton, in Nottinghamshire. In his brief reference, entirely sympathetic, Dr. Rufus Jones has this paragraph, which will serve well as our starting-point :

“ Walter Hilton is the best known of the popular writers of mystical literature in England in the fourteenth century. He was, as was Rolle, an Oxford scholar and a contemporary of Wyclif—the probable date of his death being 1395. He was a man of rare and saintly life, ‘travailing busily with all the powers of his soul to fulfil the truth of good life.’ A very strong case has been made out for settling upon him the authorship of the *Imitation of Christ*, and, though it is practically certain that he did not write it, it is high praise to say, what critics generally admit, that he *might have written it*” (*Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 338).

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The Scale of Perfection, of which there are five MSS. in the British Museum, was often printed. In recent times two editions have appeared, one of which was re-issued by the Art and Book Company, in 1908. In this edition the *Treatise written to a Devout Man* is included. There is also a short treatise *Of the Song of Angels* included in *The Cell of Self-Knowledge* (Chatto & Windus). The references throughout are to *The Scale of Perfection*.

The personal notes, though few, are suggestive. They are like little windows through which we catch glimpses of a rich landscape beyond. Once and again he states that his words, often most searching, have a double purpose, "both for thy profit and my own." He writes for the guidance of a "Contemplative," an Anchoress whom he addresses as "Ghostly Sister in Christ Jesus," though his words have often a wider reference. In fellowship with all saintly souls, he has a very lowly opinion of himself. Dwelling upon "the endless mercy of our Lord," it is of mercy "to thee and to me and to all sinful caitiffs." In another place he describes himself as "a wretched caitiff, living in sin." He never writes in a dictatorial spirit, but always by way of guidance and direction :

"This is my opinion herein; do thou better if thou canst." "Not that I would by these discourses limit God's working by the law of my speaking, as

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to say God worketh thus in a soul and no otherwise. No, I mean not so, but I speak after my simple feeling that our Lord worketh thus in some creatures as I conceive. And I hope well, also, that He worketh otherwise, which passeth my wit and my feeling" (p. 235).

Nor does he write in any self-righteous spirit, claiming himself to be and to do all that he teaches. Like St. Paul, he too knows that he has not yet attained, nor is yet made perfect. After writing of the Contemplative life, what it is, and of the ways thereto, he adds :

" Not as if I had it myself in feeling and in working, as I have it in talking. Nevertheless, I would by this writing of mine (such as it is) first stir up my own negligence to do better than I have done ; and also my purpose is to stir thee, or any other man or woman that hath taken the state of life Contemplative, to travail more diligently and more humbly in that manner of life, by such simple words as God hath given me grace for to say" (pp. 131—2).

The guide and teacher in spiritual things must always lay himself open to the charge of urging upon others duties which he himself but imperfectly fulfils. His duty is to set forth the best he knows, the ideal life, and it is no shame to himself if that ideal life has not been realised in his own, provided always that he " follows the gleam." Imperfection is not always inconsistency. No true Christian ever claimed to be perfect. He is inconsistent

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when he ceases to "follow after"—that he may attain.

Here is Hilton's statement :

"In answer to that which thou saidst, that I spake too high of prayer, I grant well that I spake more than I myself can or may do. Nevertheless, I spake it for this intent that thou shouldst know how we ought to pray; and when we cannot do so, that we should acknowledge our weakness with all humility and God's mercy" (p. 43).

If others attain where he fails, he will rejoice :

"God knows I speak more than I do myself. But I pray thee do thus as I say, by the grace of God, if thou canst, or any other man that will, for it would be a comfort to my heart—though I have it not in myself that which I say—that I might have it in thee, or in any other creature, which hath received more plenty of His grace than I" (p. 105).

Of the gracious beholding of Jesus, and the virtue and graces of the soul whose spiritual eye is opened to the vision of His glory, he writes : "I am afraid to speak anything of it, for me thinketh that I cannot, it passeth my attempt, and my lips are unclean" (p. 273).

"A beautiful soul"—this term has rarely found more justification. There is a tenderness, a lowliness of mind, and openness and teachableness of spirit, which win our trust and reverence. If Walter Hilton is in any sense a fair type of fourteenth-

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century piety, and we know he is not alone, then we shall have to revise some of our estimates of those times, and learn to think more worthily alike of our fellow-Christians, and of the enriching grace of God. Personal religion was a reality to him. This is his essential Mysticism, a vital experience of God, and of God in and through Jesus Christ. Voices and visions, and the abnormal generally, have no attraction for him. He knows the danger in these, and, as we have seen, knows how to bring all these to the test.

For himself he declares :

“ Verily I had rather feel and have a true and clean desire in my heart to my Lord Jesus Christ, though I see little of Him with my spiritual eye, than to have without this desire all the bodily penance of all men living, all visions, all revelations of Angels appearing, all songs and sounding to the ear, all tastes and smellings, fervours or any delights, or bodily feelings, and (to be brief) all the joys of heaven and earth which are possible to be had, without this desire to my Lord Jesus ” (p. 69).

To his “ dear brother in Christ,” the devout layman for whose instruction he is writing, he says :

“ Seek and nourish only this desire for God Himself, and seek not after any feeling in thy corporal senses, external or internal, nor any sensible sweetness or devotion, neither by the ear nor by the taste of thy palate, nor by any wonderful light or sight of thy eyes, nor seek the sight of Angels, no, though our Lord Himself would appear

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in His body to the sight of thy eyes, make no great matter of that" (p. 338).

Following the usual division, Hilton writes of "two manner of lives in which a Christian is to be saved"—*Active* and *Contemplative*. The *Active* life is for all, to be practised "according to their best knowledge and ability, and as reason and discretion shall require." The *Contemplative* life belongs especially to those who have withdrawn themselves from "outward businesses, and wholly given themselves soul and body to the service of God, by exercises of the soul."

But these two lives are not incompatible—they can be, and ought to be, united by Christian men and women. "Thou shalt mingle the works of active life with the spiritual works of the contemplative life, and then thou dost well," is the advice to "a Devout Man." This mixed life "belongeth to Prelates of holy Church, and to pastors and curates." "And this mixed life did our Lord in Himself exercise, and show in the same manner, for an example to all other men that have taken on them the state or condition that requireth the exercise of the said mixed life" (p. 324).

As Hilton holds Jesus Christ in supreme reverence, we cannot doubt that he counts the "mixed life" as the highest. This life he himself followed, and though his *Scale of Perfection* was written for

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a "Contemplative," and though he holds this life in great reverence, believing that therein a special fulness of spiritual joy is found, yet he knows also this separated life is for the few whom God calls thereto. "Let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God"—such, it seems to me, is Hilton's teaching. "For thou must think, that since He hath put thee into that charge and estate of life, that it is the very best for thee, and that thou canst not do better than in performing what belongs thereto in the best manner and with all the willingness and gladness of mind that thou art able" (p. 330).

For the most part, Hilton's teaching is practical. Once and again he touches speculative questions, hinting, as it were, that he was familiar with these matters, and could, if so minded, deal with them, but his controlling purpose is to be definitely and practically useful. Thus of sin he says: "Verily it is *nought*, or no real thing." But at once he realises that his words will convey no clear meaning, and proceeds to speak of sin as "a false inordinate love of thyself," out of which flow the seven deadly sins, "pride, envy, anger, sloth, covetousness, gluttony and lechery," and of each of these he writes at length. In one passage he shows his knowledge of the speculative doctrine of "Union." "He who by ravishing of love is become united to God, God

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and that soul are not now two, but both one. And surely in this *Oneing* consisteth the marriage which passeth betwixt God and the soul, that shall never be dissolved or broken" (p. 10). But this thought is not dwelt upon further.

So also he is familiar with the mystical doctrine of interpretation of Scripture, which, when the spiritual eye is opened, and Jesus is Himself the teacher, "is expounded and declared *literally, morally, mystically, and heavenly*, if the matter will bear it." His own use of Scripture, which is full, is always appropriate, with little trace of allegorising. The only instance of really poor and unsatisfactory symbolism is, when following St. Gregory, he writes of Rachel and Leah as types of "the two kinds of lives that are in the holy Church" (p. 331f.). He also speaks of the Sisters of Bethany in the usual way, urging his disciple to be "sometimes busy with Martha . . . and sometimes with Mary . . . at the feet of our Lord with humility, in prayers and holy thoughts and in *Contemplation of Him*" (p. 320).

For Hilton, the one great truth is "the uncreated love of God," and communion with Him in love and humility. "Ask, then, of God nothing but this gift of love, which is the Holy Ghost. For among all the gifts that our Lord giveth there is none so good, nor so profitable, so worthy, nor so excellent as this is. For there is no gift of God that is both

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the giver and the gift, but this gift of love" (p. 254). It is the love of God which "cleanseth us from our sins," and "stirreth us up to exercise ourselves" in all virtues.

The assertion that the Mystics, in finding God, "leave Jesus behind," is wholly inapplicable to Hilton. In his teaching, as in his experience, the desire for God and for Jesus are one.

"He worketh this desire in thee, and giveth it thee; and He it is that desireth in thee, and He it is that is desired; He is all, and He doeth all" (p. 198). "Jesus is endless might, wisdom and goodness, righteousness, truth, holiness and mercy" (p. 299). "He is all-sovereign might and all-sovereign verity and all-sovereign goodness" (p. 250). "Jesus Christ, that blessed Person, God and Man, Son of the Virgin Mary—that is all goodness, endless wisdom, love and sweetness, thy joy, thy glory, and thy everlasting bliss, thy God, thy Lord, and thy salvation" (p. 67). "For wot thou well, that what thou feelest of Him, be it never so much, yea, though thou wert ravished with St. Paul into the third heaven, yet hast thou not found Jesus as He is in His joy; know thou, or feel thou never so much of Him, He is still above it" (p. 68).

Hilton's guidance into and along the "Mystic Way" is at once clear, direct and practicable. He knows full well that

"neither grace alone, without the full working of the soul so far as it can, nor the man's working alone, without grace, bringeth the soul to the reforming in feeling, the which reforming consisteth in

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perfect love and charity. But that both joined together, bringeth into a soul the blessed feeling of perfect love. The which grace cannot rest fully, but only on humble souls that be full of the fear of God" (p. 183). "The which grace, for its part, is most willing and ready to shine to all creatures, and enter into the souls of men, that will but be willing to receive it, even as the sun shineth upon all creatures bodily, where it is not hindered" (p. 172).

"A soul that would know spiritual things needs first to have the knowledge of itself." "Withdraw thy thoughts from all bodily things outward, and from minding of thy own body, also from all thy five senses, as much as thou canst, and think on the nature of a reasonable soul spiritually, as thou wouldest think for to know any virtue, as justice, humility or any other. Right so think that a soul is a life immortal, invisible, and hath in itself a power to know the sovereign verity, and for to love the sovereign goodness which is God; when thou seest this, then feelest thou somewhat of thyself" (p. 227). "Nevertheless, I say not that thy soul should rest still in this knowing, but it shall by this seek a higher knowledge above itself, and that is the nature of God, for the soul is but a glass in the which thou shouldest see God spiritually" (p. 228). "For thy soul and my soul and every rational soul is an image, and that a worthy one, for it is the image of God" (p. 133). "It behoveth thee to delve deep in thy heart, for therein Jesus is hid, and cast out perfectly all loves, and likings, sorrows and fears of all earthly things, and so shall thou find wisdom, that is Jesus" (p. 70). "See then the mercy and courtesy of Jesus. Thou hast lost Him, but where? Soothly in thy house, that is to say, in thy soul, that if thou hadst lost all thy reason of thy soul by

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its first sin, thou shouldst never have found Him again: but He left thee thy reason, and so He is still in thy soul, and never is quite lost out of it. Nevertheless thou art never the nearer Him till thou hast found Him. He is in thee, though He be lost from thee; but thou art not in Him till thou hast found Him. This is His mercy also, that He would suffer Himself to be lost only there, where He may be found, so that thou needest not run to *Rome*, nor to *Jerusalem* to seek Him there, but turn thy thoughts unto thy own soul, where He is hid" (pp. 71—2).

By humility and love, the soul finds God. "Humility saith, *I am nothing, I have nothing*; Love saith, *I covet nothing, but one*, and that is Jesus" (p. 188). And by prayer, the soul is made ready and able to rejoice in God.

"Not that thou shouldst thereby make our Lord know what thou desirest, for He knoweth well enough what thou needest, but to dispose thee and make thee ready and able thereby, as a clean vessel, to receive the grace which our Lord would freely give thee, which grace cannot be felt till thou be exercised and purified by the fire of desire in devout prayer. For though it be so that prayer is not the *cause* for which our Lord giveth grace, nevertheless it is a way or means by which grace freely given cometh into the soul" (p. 34). "For prayer is nothing else but an ascending or getting up of the desire of the heart into God, by withdrawing of it from all earthly thoughts" (p. 35). "And though thou be at prayer, or at thy devotions, that thou thinkest loth to break off, for that thou thinkest that thou oughtest not leave God for to

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speak with anyone, I think not so in this case, for if thou be wise thou shalt not leave God, but thou shalt find Him, and have Him, and see Him, in thy neighbour, as well as in prayer, only in another manner" (p. 119).

In reading the books of the Mystics many, I think, must have felt confused and troubled by the use of unfamiliar terms for spiritual experience. Again and again it seems as though some secret of life were about to be disclosed, and yet the secret, if such it be, is illusive. This, I am sure, is especially true of Theosophy, and indeed must be, for its secret whatsoever it be, is revealed only to the fully initiated. But pure, religious Mysticism is not of this character. Its secret is an open one ; it is the mystery of love, hid indeed from the unloving, and not to be known by reason, or scholarship, but only by loving. Where love is, all else is that is vital to true religion ; where love is not, then all is wanting.

This is the Mysticism of Walter Hilton. He recognised the possibility of confusion and troubled thoughts through the use of strange terms, and he guarded himself against this, using, for the most part, simple and homely terms, and where other terms are used explaining them with care. Here is a passage which illustrates what I mean. He has been speaking of how love opens the spiritual eye

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by cleansing the soul from all deadly sins ; and he adds :

“ This opening of the spiritual eye is that light-some darkness and rich nought that I spake of before, and it may be called *purity of spirit and spiritual rest, inward stillness and peace of conscience, highness of thought and loneliness of soul, a lively feeling of grace and retiredness of heart, the watchful sleep of the spouse and tasting of heavenly savour, burning in love, and shining in light, the gate of Contemplation and reforming in feelings.* All these expressions are found in holy writings of divers men, for every one of them speaketh according to his feeling in grace. And though all these be divers in show of words yet are they all one in meaning and verity ; for that soul which through visiting of grace hath one of them hath all ” (pp. 273—4).

The difficulty of terms may repel some, and so bring to an abrupt conclusion their study of the Mystics, though the really serious difficulty is of another character—we are hindered by our own sloth. Others there are who have to fight with their own fears and self-distrust. To these Walter Hilton speaks. He bids all who are “ in the way ” beware of their enemies. Certain temptations are peculiar to earnest souls ; and against these he forewarns. These are—*the backward look*, which would recall past sins unconfessed, or but imperfectly confessed ; *the sense of unworthiness* of the love of God, *anticipations of failure, the fear and opposition of man, flattery and vain pleasing.* Under

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each of these heads, Hilton has very wise and helpful counsel (p. 192*f*). But the two deadly sins against which those who have been enlightened are most earnestly warned, are : “ presumption and exalting of himself ” and “ the down-putting and disdaining of his neighbour ” (p. 209).

“ It is no mastery to watch and fast till thy head ache ; nor to run to Rome or Jerusalem on pilgrimage upon thy bare feet ; nor for to stir about and preach, or if thou wouldest turn all men by thy preaching. Nor is it any mastery to build churches or chapels, or to feed poor men and build hospitals. But it is mastery for a man to love his neighbour in charity, and wisely hate his sin and love the man ” (p. 93).

Upon all, the duty of ceaseless endeavour after richer and fuller spiritual life is solemnly urged—“ for a soul cannot stand still always in one state, for it is either profiting in grace, or decaying through sin.”

Much more might be written, but enough, I hope, has been given to attract serious students of Mysticism to Walter Hilton. One further word only must be added. Hilton was a loyal son of his Church, himself in its official ministry, and faithful to all its observances. A firm faith in all the Articles and Sacraments of the Church, and obedience to all the laws and ordinances of prelates and rulers, is, as we should expect, unhesitatingly enforced.

CHAPTER X

SPIRITUAL RELIGION

MYSTICISM is the experience of God, the immediacy and reality of *God in us*, and of God as known to us in and through Jesus Christ. The inward experience must be based upon and controlled by the outward Revelation ; only thus can it be freed from aberrations. This is the Mysticism not of thought or of feeling alone, but of inspiration and of power ; and this, as I hold, is the true religious Mysticism, as witnessed to by the great Christian Mystics. It is the realisation of the eternal truth : “ Ye are a Sanctuary of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.”

“ There in that Supreme Region and sacred Temple of the Soul the Highest Good delights to dwell, to manifest Himself and to give Himself to the Creature, in a way above sense and all understanding.”—so writes the author of *The Spiritual Guide*. In another place he quotes the words of St. Augustine :

“ I, Lord, went wandering like a strayed sheep, seeking Thee with anxious reasonings without, whilst Thou wast within me. I wearied myself

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much in looking for Thee without, and yet Thou hast Thy habitation within me. I went round the streets and squares of the City of this world seeking Thee ; and I found Thee not, because in vain I sought without for Him who was within myself.”

This is the message of the Mystics, their discovery for themselves and their testimony to us. Whatever their outward condition of life, whether that of the Monk, the Priest, or the Layman, and whatever their ecclesiastical beliefs and observances, this was their one vital unity, a religion of the Spirit, the experience of God as Spirit in direct fellowship with the spirit which man also is ; and this fellowship is in love, with God who is Love, and in the love of God, a love which is known best, and always expressed, in love one to another. “ The Holy Ghost is Love ”—so they found, and taught. God and His gift are one, for “ God is Love.” This is the truth of their experience, but they had not known it thus without the “ Sacred Humanity ”—meditation upon which was practised and enforced by all. Indeed, in their *experience*, no distinction is known between Christ and God. “ It is all One,” is their witness.

We reach the same conclusion as to the essential element in their Mysticism from their doctrine of Prayer. It has to be confessed that their terminology and their systematisings are very

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bewildering. There is no general agreement, at least I have found it impossible to draw up any common method for prayer. Nor is this to be regretted ; we are thrown back upon the underlying unity. The one truth which has to find a place in our thought of prayer is its universality for life—we are to “pray without ceasing.”

Once and again this Apostolic injunction arrests attention when prayer is being discussed. Hence, over and above all instructions as to methods of prayer, we find definitions which cover wider ground. Thus it is said : “ Prayer is an elevation of the mind to God ”—“ the desire of the soul turned to God ”—“ the application of the heart to God and the inward exercise of love.” And when the hindrances to special times and acts of prayer are thought of, the true spirit of prayer, which should inspire and control all life, is at once perceived, and it is said : “ True prayer consists when the soul loves ” and is found “ in recognition of the Will of God.”

The terse saying of the Lady Julian gathers up the whole truth : “ Prayer oneth the soul to God.” With this in mind it will not appear strange to us that in a book like the *Imitation*, there is no special instruction as to Prayer. The soul “ oned ” to God needs no further guidance. All else in the devout life will follow naturally. So again we

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reach our conclusion. "To enjoy God without intermediary," the first-hand experience of God, is the essential truth of Christian Mysticism.

¶ We are then, as it seems to me, thrown back upon the Bible as the one sure and best guide in the Mystic Way. ¶ Even in the Hebrew Scriptures we have Mysticism of the finest type. It was out of an intense and vital religious experience that the great Prophets spoke and wrote. God was a reality, a present reality, to them. The Word of the Lord was "as a fire in their heart," a very "burden" upon the soul.

It is, however, in one or two of the Psalms that the utterance of personal experience is most direct. The soul that had the experience of God which the CXXXIXth Psalm described was a Mystic of a true type. He speaks of a dual life of which he is conscious, of a Presence that follows him everywhere, and from which there is no possible escape. A Presence, moreover, not *by his side*, haunting him like his own shadow, but a presence *within*, where thought works, and feeling is stirred, searching the heart, trying the thoughts, judging every life movement at its secret spring. A second self, an uprush of "the subliminal consciousness"—not that, nor anything like it. It is a greater than self, greater and holier, with august authority. Not a law simply; law is impersonal, inarticulate. Not

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a voice merely, but a Righteous Will, as truly personal as is the soul itself. A Power, an Authority, a Will which encompasses his life ; a Presence which besets him behind and before and lays its hand upon the centre of his life. Resisted it may be, and silenced, at least for the moment, but only to re-assert its authority in the first calm hour of self-communion. Forgotten in sleep, but with him again the moment he awakes from sleep, searching him through and through, dealing out blame and praise with impartial judgment. Had we written the Psalm, we should have spoken of "Conscience," and under a mere name concealed our ignorance. This Mystic speaks of God. This, he tells us, is God's Presence in the Soul. God is found there, bound up with the soul's life.

But the highest Mysticism is not possible except where there is the richest content in the name God. The experience does not give the revelation of Truth, it turns knowledge into Life and belief into Faith. Hence the place of Jesus Christ in Mystical Religion—the Christ of History, and the Christ of Faith, for the two cannot be separated. It is in the life of Jesus that we must study Mysticism at its highest. In His Life we see what perfect communion with God is, the Human and the Divine perfectly *at One*.

And the power of that Life continues. That was

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the experience of the first Apostles, and it has been the experience of His followers through the centuries. The great mystical sayings of St. Paul have this for their significance. "I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me." "Alive unto God in Christ Jesus." "Your life is hid with Christ in God." "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." "Christ in you the hope of glory." It is not in the extraordinary raptures of the great Apostle that we find his Mysticism, but in this full and rich personal consciousness of union with Christ. For him "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" was the great Faith. Through all his wonderful activities it was "the love of Christ" which constrained him. For him love was the fulfilling of the law. To him we owe the inspired chapter on Christian Love.

The Mystic Way is ever the Way of the Cross. "He that would come after Me let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." To live the Christ-life was the one hope and prayer of the Mystics. "I am not now asking you to meditate on Him nor to produce great thoughts, nor to feel deep devotion: I only ask you to look at Him. Who can prevent you turning the eyes of your soul on our Lord?" It is St. Teresa who so bids us "consider Christ." "If you feel happy, think of Him at His Resurrection. If you have trials to

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bear, if you are sorrowful, watch Him on His way to the garden." "Christ who is our life," the Way for us to walk in, the Truth for us to experience, the Life to reproduce His life in ours—it is thus we know what life truly is, "the realisation of human personality as characterised by, and consummated in, the indwelling reality of the Spirit of Christ, which is God" (*Atonement and Personality*, p. 312).

He who would quicken that life in others must know it in himself. This is the strange, mystic power of preaching, and we welcome its reappearance in the preaching of our own day. In every great religious revival this has been the secret force. It was the appeal and persuasion of personal experience which drew crowds to listen to Gerard the Great, and which arrested men of all classes, and turned their lives into better ways. "He preached out of his own life—what *he knew*." It was this power which was behind the pre-reformation in England. "God is our best Master, and ready to teach true men all things profitable and needful for their souls"—so wrote Wyclif, and out of this direct teaching he, and his itinerant preachers, appealed to the people.

It was this power which Luther knew, and used. His own vital religious experience urged him forward in all his great work. He discovered for himself, and preached as the Gospel for all, the true

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Mystical Faith, that nothing is received from God because we are worthy, but we receive God's grace in Christ that we may become worthy. All is of God, of His great Love in Christ—the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing of His Spirit, the gift of Himself—and taking His gifts and Himself, for Giver and gifts are one, the soul that so experiences God is moved to all spiritual endeavour, and freely gives itself in love. "He is our justification" was Luther's great saying. "Christ in you the hope of glory" is the Mystic faith. It was this power of personal experience and personal appeal which was in the movement of the Wesleys, as their hymns show. It was not until after his own deeper, more real and personal experience of the things of God that John Wesley's great work became possible. The story bears repetition. At a meeting of a Moravian Society in London "there entered into his soul, as by a flash of light, a joyful assurance that his sins were freely forgiven." So he testified everywhere of the Grace of God which might be experienced in renewing power anywhere and everywhere where God and the soul might meet.

And this is the message our age calls for. On every hand there is the cry of a great need. Religion, it is felt, has again become too formal, and unspiritual; activities abound, interesting, even eloquent, preaching is not lacking, but the note of urgency and

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reality is missing. The need is for " religion in its most acute, intense, and living stage." The rebuke of Thomas à Kempis rests upon us : " We are glad to see others perfect : and yet we mend not our own faults." We are so busy in religious things that we have no time for serious religion. The machinery is there, and " up-to-date," but the moving power is wholly inadequate.

St. Teresa's criticism of the preachers of her own day is, I fear, only too true of many in ours :

" They have a good intention, and their work is good ; yet still few amend their lives. But how is it that there are not many who, in consequence of these sermons, abstain from public sins ? Well, I think it is because the preachers are highly sensible men. They are not burning with the great fire of the love of God, as the Apostles were, casting worldly prudence aside ; and so their fire throws out but little heat " (*Life*, p. 131).

During the last few years I have had opportunities of hearing preachers in many parts of Great Britain, and, with notable exceptions, the impression left upon my mind is that preachers generally do not seem to take their great work seriously to heart. They are " highly sensible men," and can write very interesting essays, but too often they have no message, no " burden of the Lord " which they *must* deliver. They sound no note of Mysticism, and rarely speak out of an intense personal experience.

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“Wanted is what?”—I believe the almost unanimous answer to that question by our religious leaders would be: the revival of personal religion.

“What we want is not to know Truth, Beauty, and Goodness—though that is necessary by the way; it is to be true, beautiful, and good. We want God in us and with us—not immanently and naturally as He is in everything, but personally and transcendently as He is only in those who are themselves in Him, whose faith and hope and love are in Him, and whose holiness, righteousness, and life are His in them” (*The Constructive Quarterly*, March, 1913, p. 14).

As the same writer puts the need in his valuable preface to *Liberal and Mystical Writings of William Law*: “We want a real God, the living Christ, not only in meditation but in action, not in our retreats only, but in our furthest advances, in our most active enterprises and our most enterprising activities.”

“Not only in meditation,” true; but first, and, at the present time, most surely in our meditation. It is this which is most lacking. We must feed the fires of the Divine within.

CHAPTER XI

THE MYSTIC LIFE

SINCE the foregoing chapters were written a new contribution to the question before us has appeared. The author of *Mysticism* has again laid all students of the subject under obligation by her serious consideration of the relation between Mysticism and Christianity, which is discussed in her new book, *The Mystic Way*.

The position held is clearly stated. "All the doctrines and all the experiences characteristic of genuine Christian Mysticism can be found in the New Testament ; and I believe that its emergence as a definite type of spiritual life coincides with the emergence of Christianity itself, in the person of its Founder" (Preface, p. vii.). This statement is indeed most important. It has this obvious advantage—it narrows the question, and by defining the field of discussion, makes possible definite issues. Mysticism, in the wide field of Christian history, is far too large a subject for adequate treatment in any book, or indeed by any single writer. But the Mysticism of the Founder of Christianity can be so considered, and its very earnest study is pressed upon every thoughtful Christian.

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The really vital question is thus raised—What is the very heart and essence of Christian Mysticism ? The author rejects, and rightly rejects, the idea that “Christian Mysticism is no integral part of Christianity.” The attainment of the “Kingdom” is urged upon all. “He that would come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” is the way of Discipleship, the only way. It is not possible to escape the conclusion that what Christianity meant for its Founder it means also for all who are called by His Name.

This was Apostolic Christianity. That “Christ is our Life, to reproduce His life in ours”—is the uniform teaching of St. Paul. This was his own most earnest prayer and endeavour, and it was ever his Gospel message. He counted himself and his fellow-workers as “stewards of the mysteries of God,” mysteries “kept in silence through times eternal, *but now manifested*,” “the mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations: but *now hath it been manifested to His saints . . .* which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Not for Himself alone, but for all “saints,” for “all that call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours,” the “life in Christ” was and is an essential element in their religion. This is Christian Mysticism, not *a stage in*, but *an essential element of*, any life which is truly

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Christian. It is just this which we mean by the statement that Christianity is a Life, a vital experience of religion, the direct personal and all-controlling, all-inspiring fellowship of the Spirit of Christ and the spirit which is man.

It is exceedingly desirable that we should understand the terms we use in any discussion, and most of all in this discussion. "I give and demand change for phrases," was the test principle of Maurice. It is very necessary to apply the test to the term "Mysticism." Far too often it is used as a synonym for mystery or mystification, "a dreamy contemplation on ideas that have no foundation in human experience," to quote a dictionary definition. This, I think, must be insisted upon; the "Mystic Way" is not to be identified with Mysticism. A *form of experience*, its interpretation, or sequence, is not *the experience itself*. Life is ever more than its forms and manifestations.

In the book now before us is the following statement :

"The great Christians of the primitive time, the great Mystics in whom their spirit has lived on, exhibit, one and all, an organic growth, pass through a series of profound psychic changes and re-adjustments, by which they move from the condition of that which we like to call the 'normal man' to that state of spiritual maturity, of an actually enhanced power of dealing with circumstances, which they sometimes call the 'Unitive Life.'

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This sequence of psychological states is the 'Mystic Way,' which gives its title to my book" (Preface, p. viii.).

As a matter of fact, it is not possible to justify this absolute statement. There are great Mystics concerning whose personal life we know too little to be able to speak thus of them. Their *writings* we know, but their *experience* we do not know. This is especially true of "The Johannine Mystic." This our author has to admit. She writes :

"In the fourth Gospel we see nothing of this 'process of becoming,' though the life presented is the Pauline life mirrored in a different temperament. This book is written from the standpoint of one in whom the 'great work' of readjustment is already accomplished; and who has 'entered the Kingdom' and knows himself a member of a new order, inhabited by a new life" (p. 219).

Whether or not this Mystic "passed through a series of profound psychic changes and readjustments" it is quite impossible to say. He knew "The Life"—and that is everything. What that life was we can also say; and in declaring it we define true Christian Mysticism. It was the "Eternal Life," or again to change the phrase, "Spiritual Life," a life in closest fellowship with the Eternal Spirit.

A "sequence of psychological states" is not Mysticism, however marked that sequence may be in the experience of certain Mystics. As in Theology,

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so also in Mysticism, the craving after a well-defined and orderly system is fatal. It is now generally recognised that no systematic theology can be built up out of the Christian Scriptures. The same conclusion in regard to Mysticism is forced upon us by a somewhat wide study of the writings of the Mystics. The endeavour to force all through the same mould of experience utterly fails. Some of us can recall the time when this was the method followed with regard to Conversion, and Christian Discipleship. The method broke down utterly in face of the facts of life. Now it is just here, I think, where the author of the *Mystic Way* altogether fails. With the assertion that Christian Mysticism must find its highest illustration in the person of its Founder, we are in fullest agreement, but this is not to say that each and all of the stages of the *Mystic Way*, as usually described, and as illustrated in the lives of some Mystics, must be found in the Life of Christ. Yet this is Miss Underhill's contention.

In the Scale, or Ladder of Perfection, we are told, are these stages : Conversion, Purgation, Illumination, the Dark Night of the Soul, the State of Union. In the life of Jesus these are said to correspond to the Baptism ; Temptation in the Wilderness ; the Early Ministry culminating in the Transfiguration ; the Way of the Cross—Gethsemane and Calvary ;

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the Cross and Resurrection. Such a scheme breaks down utterly in face of the Gospel narratives. The impression which that Life makes upon us is not thus to be systematised. Jesus appears before us, from the first, as equal to His task. That the Baptism meant much to Jesus Himself we cannot doubt—but we cannot believe that then, for the first time, “the strange, new life latent in Jesus of Nazareth suddenly flooded His human consciousness. That consciousness was abruptly lifted to new levels; suddenly became aware of Reality, and of its own complete participation in Reality” (p. 87). The thirty years of silence were not thus empty and unspiritual. The Baptism was the Ordination of one already prepared, the solemn and public dedication of Himself to the great work over which He had long brooded. The Temptation itself turns upon this previous spiritual preparation. It was essentially related to His Mission, how that Mission now entered upon should be fulfilled, and in each of the three great trials of faith, victory was won by the life in and with God already attained. The Transfiguration also has the like significance. The “decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem” was the subject of His meditation and prayer. That there were great crises in the life of Jesus is clear indeed, but these were always incident to His Mission, and how they were met reveals the Mind of Christ; for great

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critical moments do not fashion the soul—they reveal it, prove what has been and is. Even so Gethsemane and Calvary express the victory of the wilderness. So, as I read the Story, the impression throughout is of One equal to His Task, “ made perfect through the things which He suffered,” but perfect most of all as Saviour and Redeemer of men.

Even in the skilful hands of the author, this scheme, as applied to Jesus, breaks down altogether. The admissions are significant—and fatal to the scheme. Thus she writes : “ There is one deeply significant difference between this psychological crisis in the life of Jesus and its lesser equivalent in the lives of Christian and other Mystics. I mean *the total absence of the ‘ sense of sin ’* ” (p. 89). Again, we read : “ His growth in the Transcendent Order was of *an unequalled swiftness*, that a personal and impassioned consciousness of *unbroken* union with Reality was *from the first* the centre of His secret life ” (p. 145). The words which I have emphasised are, I think, a tacit admission that the endeavour to interpret the one Supreme Experience by any experience less than itself has failed, and must fail.

The same conclusion is forced upon us by the following comparison of the experience of St. Paul with that of Jesus : “ Once more we see the enormous difference in quality between the nature of Jesus

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and that of His first and greatest successor. With Him, the stress and effort which is felt behind all Paul's attainments are concentrated into the two swift and furious battles of the Wilderness and of Gethsemane" (p. 172).

From a careful study of the author's third chapter: "St. Paul and the Mystic Way," I have been forced to the same conclusion as to the supreme importance of distinguishing between a "sequence of psychological states" and Christian Mysticism. The Mysticism of Jesus was His Oneness with the Father, a life wholly "oned," to use the common mystic term. The Mysticism of St. Paul was expressed by himself: "Christ liveth in me." The peculiar form of certain of his experiences was determined by his individual psychical constitution.

With this qualification, the assertion may be accepted that St. Paul "is the supreme example of the Christian Mystic; of a 'change of mind' resulting in an enormous dower of vitality: of a career of impassioned activity, of 'divine fecundity' second only to that of Jesus Himself" (p. 159). When, however, it is said that his conversion "was of course characteristically mystical" we must exercise caution. "The light, the voice, the blindness," are *accidents*, not *essentials* of that "vivid consciousness of a personal and crucial encounter with the spiritual world" (p. 160). Every true

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conversion is a mystical experience, but there is no one *form* of the experience which is to be looked for in every case. She “whose heart the Lord opened” experienced conversion as truly as did St. Paul.

Again, when it is said: “St. Paul’s proceedings after his conversion are no less characteristic of the peculiar mystic type. His first instinct was an instinct of retreat” (p. 163), we must press the question of the significance of this retreat for St. Paul himself. His own words tell what this was: “that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.” It was for preparation for his life-work that he withdrew into seclusion. Nor may the period of self-discipline be limited to any definite part of his career. All through his life, and up to its close, he “counted not himself to have apprehended;” but ever “pressed on toward the goal.” One illustration of how this attempt to work the Apostle’s experience into the mould of the Mystic Way is characteristic of all systematisers—the facts are more or less forced to fit the theory. Much that the author has to say of the Apostle’s inward life as revealed in his successive letters is helpful and suggestive, but the inferences are by no means convincing.

The Epistle to the Romans holds a critical place, and a very special and individual interpretation of the 7th and 8th Chapters is essential, if the author’s contention is to be established. The experience

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described in these chapters must fit in with one critical period in the Apostle's life, one stage of his spiritual development—"the last purification of personality," "the very frontier of the new life," "the moment of supreme attainment." Somewhat full quotation is necessary to do the writer justice:

"The epistle to the Romans appears to be the literary expression of the last phase in Paul's long struggle for transcendence. In the 7th and 8th chapters of that most wonderful of letters, we seem to see the travail of his interior life coming to its term, the new state towards which his growth was directed established at last" (p. 183).

And again, writing of the contrast between the experiences described in the two chapters:

"The sudden wild happiness of the spirit caught up to supreme communion with the Absolute has seldom found finer expression than this: here another personality seems to speak from the heart-broken prisoner who had cried but a page or two earlier, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'" (p. 185).

All turns upon the assumption that the experience of the 7th Chapter is the Apostle's own experience, and at one definitely defined period in his life, and, further, upon the assumption that the confidence and gladness of the 8th Chapter follow that experience almost immediately. This most important fact, as it seems to me, has been overlooked: the experiences of the 7th Chapter are not summed up

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in the cry of seeming hopelessness and despair, “Who shall deliver me out of (R.V.) the body of this death ?” That cry does not end the chapter, and very certainly it does not complete the Apostle’s thought. Drawing upon his knowledge of himself, and upon his insight into human life, he gathers up and concentrates in a single portraiture “all the struggles of the natural man with temptation,” his conflict *before* Christ has “shined upon him,” and then, in one triumphant outburst, he proclaims his Gospel—“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This is the only possible conclusion of the Apostle’s description, and to omit this is to miss the very aim and purpose of all that has gone before. Up to this point, in that finely imaginative and dramatic picture, there is no word of Christianity, and for him to write of human sorrows and conflicts without one word of hope was altogether impossible. Indeed the 7th Chapter of Romans has its text in an earlier letter : “The sting of death is sin ; and the power of sin is the law : but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

However we may interpret his words in the 7th Chapter, whether of his own actual experience, or of that of the “natural man,” it is quite certain that for the Apostle himself, when he wrote his

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Epistle, the conflict was long ended, ended indeed in its bitterness and severity of inward strife when he "saw the Lord," and yielded himself His servant to do His will. He who could say, out of the fulness of his own personal experience, "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me," has already rejoiced in that freedom wherewith Christ makes His people free.

For, and this is the very Gospel which the Apostle preached, Christ brings deliverance from this terrible inward conflict, wherever and whenever He is known in His saving grace.

The abnormal experiences of the Apostle are too well known to need detailed reference. But I must again protest against an appeal to these as proving their necessary association with Christian Mysticism. "Visions and revelations of the Lord," ecstatic utterances, gifts of tongues, and of healing, found their place in his life. In this connection his personal testimony may be quoted: "I thank God I speak with tongues more than you all." But it is altogether to misjudge the case if we omit to quote the words which follow: "Howbeit in the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue."

The Apostle's "thorn in the flesh" is counted "a

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more human mark of his thoroughly mystical temperament" (p. 174), an evidence that he experienced that "mystic ill health" which, we are told, is "the natural result, and not the pathological cause, of the characteristic activities of the Mystics." The breakdown of the physical constitution has often been the penalty of altogether excessive and unwise self-discipline, against which many of the Mystics warn their disciples. Out of this excess and consequent "ill health" have come all manner of abnormalities, exaggerations and superstitions, but surely it is an assumption to connect the Apostle's "thorn in the flesh" with this condition.

It is not necessary to discuss the origin of St. Paul's bodily affliction, concerning which it is quite impossible to come to any conclusion. It were strange indeed if one who had endured all the labours, and afflictions, and sufferings recounted in his second letter to the Corinthians should know no permanent disability.

Of this "mystic ill-health," there is no trace, no hint, in the life of Jesus, nor can we admit the thought of it when speaking of His experience, a further evidence that the systematising of that Divine Life is impossible.

It becomes evident that in this discussion of Mysticism, we really approach a far more vital question, the question as to Christianity itself,

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what it is, and especially what makes a Christian. Fundamentally different answers to this question cannot but result in divergent ideas as to Christian Mysticism. If, for instance, it is held "that men become Christians, in the first instance, by incorporation into one visible Christian society, and then, after that, are bound to realise individually their Christian privileges," then, of course, the mystical experience belongs to some and not to all who are "in Christ." Underlying the discussion of Mysticism there is thus discovered the old controversy of "Justification by Faith."

With this statement I am in fullest agreement :

"By 'faith' man centres himself in the spiritual order, identifies himself with its interests, and thus justifies himself as a spiritual creation; for the essence of Pauline faith is not 'belief' but *awareness of*, attention to, union with the 'Kingdom'—convinced consciousness of a life lived in the atmosphere of God" (p. 199).

It is even so, but with this added truth : "Without faith it is impossible to please God," and without faith there is no Christian man, and *faith is essentially mystical*. It is this "new kind of life," this "new type of human consciousness," which is bound up inseparably with Christianity in its personal element. Far then from being "the few chosen out of the many called," or a "thin bright chain of the Christian Mystics stretching across the centuries," the true

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Mystics are a multitude which no man can number through all the Christian centuries ; the salt of the earth, and the light of the world, because “ with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord,” they have been “ transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.”

Christianity has been defined as “ eternal life in the midst of time, by the strength and under the eyes of God.” The definition is not complete, but it is so far true, for Christianity is a life, the life of faith and of love, of love to God and love to man. Where this life is known, there is the Christian, where it is not known Christ is Himself unknown. Here the terms “ initiate ” and “ uninitiated,” as used in the old Mystics, cannot apply as defining two degrees of Christian life. The life is there or it is not, and in the measure that it is known, in that measure is the life itself mystical, spiritual. The conclusion at which we arrive has been thus stated :

“ The Mystics who have enriched the content and meaning of religion, insist that true Mysticism is neither passive nor negative nor theoretical. It is a type of religion, according to them, in which all the deep-lying powers of the personal life come into positive exercise and function, so that there results an experience, not merely emotional, not merely intellectual, not merely volitional, through which the soul finds itself in a love-relation with the Living

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God. There are all possible stages and degrees of the experience of this 'relation,' from simple awareness of the soul's Divine Companion to a rapt consciousness of union with the One and Only Reality. The term 'mystical' is properly used for any type of religion which insists upon an immediate inward revelation of God within the sphere of personal experience" (*The Beginnings of Quakerism*, Preface by Dr. Rufus M. Jones).

CHAPTER XII

QUAKERISM

A CAREFUL study of Quakerism, especially in its beginnings, is essential to the right understanding and interpretation of Religious Mysticism. This study is now greatly facilitated by the publication of *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, by William C. Braithwaite, B.A., LL.B[®], and to this book I am greatly indebted, and any references, not otherwise stated, are to this publication.

In all writings on Mysticism reference has to be made to George Fox, and his most striking experiences. Readers of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* will recall how these experiences are pressed in evidence. One sentence, however, should not be overlooked. "The Quaker religion," writes William James, "is something which it is impossible to overpraise. In a day of shams, it was a religion of veracity rooted in spiritual inwardness, and a return to something more like the original Gospel truth than men had ever known in England." It was out of this sense of the unreality of religion as witnessed on every hand that Quakerism had its origin.

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The experience of Fox himself in this respect, and his own personal testimony, are well known. The mere profession of religion, joined as it might be, with great learning, was not enough. From all hope of help from priests and ministers of religion, Fox withdrew more and more into solitude. Rebuked for his absence from the Church Services, he replied :

“ There was an anointing within man to teach him, and that the Lord would teach His people Himself.” “ When all my hope in them and in all men was gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, O then I heard a voice which said, ‘ There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,’ and, when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. . . . Then the Lord did gently lead me along, and did let me see His love, which was endless and eternal, and surpasseth all the knowledge that men have in the natural state or can get by history or books : and that love did let me see myself as I was without Him ” (p. 34).

This was Fox’s spiritual discovery—the disclosure of the Divine Presence within, himself taught directly of God, himself God’s Sanctuary. Hence his great doctrine of the Inward Light, “ the Light that lighteth every man,” and his call to all was to live in the Light. His own experience of newness of life, through the indwelling Spirit, was the ground of his confidence for others. Out of this inward compulsion all his activities proceeded.

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Nor does Fox stand alone. He found prepared groups in many places. "They were composed mainly of persons who had already dissociated themselves from established Churches, but had found living union with one another because of common convictions and a common search" (p. 131). Their earliest name was "Children of the Light"—a name "due to Fox preaching the light of Christ as the guide to eternal life" (p. 44). The origin of the designation "Quakers" is somewhat uncertain. "Fox says that Justice Bennett gave the nickname because Fox had bidden him tremble at the name of the Lord" (p. 57), but there is an earlier use of the nickname, and for other than the Friends, their self-chosen name, which arose naturally from their fellowship together.

When Quakerism is studied mainly in the life of its founder there is great danger of confusion and misleading conclusions. The principle, already insisted upon, must here be strongly urged. Allowance must be made for temperament and circumstances. In his admirable preface to *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, Dr. Rufus M. Jones dwells upon Fox's "peculiar psychical traits," and concludes :

"His psychical constitution was thus plainly of a very unstable sort, and if he had not found near the end of his adolescent period an organising, centralising, and constructive power, his story would have

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been vastly different. But fortunately he did find the centralising power—‘ the Key,’ as he calls it, ‘ which opened life to me ’” (p. xxxi.).

But this “ centralising power ” was lacking in some of the early Quakers. “ The fresh sense of indwelling spiritual life, which betrayed Fox himself into occasional extravagances, sometimes worked havoc in less stable characters ” (p. 147). Most important, therefore, is it that we should understand the truth at the heart of Quakerism, making every allowance for the weakness and fallibility of the human mind, and for the fixed ideas of the age in which they lived.

In the first chapter of his *Journal* Fox has himself gathered up the truths and principles for which he stood. Of his own experience he writes :

“ The Lord God opened to me by His invisible power, ‘ that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ ’; and I saw it shine through all ; and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation to the light of life, and became the children of it ; but they that hated it, and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the light, without the help of any man ; neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it.”

His Divinely-appointed mission was “ to turn people to that inward light, Spirit, and grace, by

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which all might know their salvation, and their way to God"; to call all people away from trust in human teachers, and from all the world's worships: "to know the Spirit of Truth in the inward parts, and to be led thereby."

In his Sermon in Court, during the sessions at Lancaster, Fox gives, in greatest fulness, his message, which is found in briefer form in many places in the *Journal*. He tells us that what he was moved to declare was this:

"That the Holy Scriptures were given forth by the Spirit of God, and all people must first come to the Spirit of God in themselves, by which they might know God and Christ, of whom the prophets and the apostles learnt; and by the same Spirit know the Holy Scriptures; for as the Spirit of God was in them that gave forth the Scriptures, so the same Spirit of God must be in all them that come to understand the Scriptures; by which Spirit they might have fellowship with the Son, and with the Father, and with the Scriptures, and with one another; and without this Spirit they can know neither God nor Christ, nor the Scriptures, nor have right fellowship one with another."

This fundamental principle of Quakerism is so vital that its fuller illustration from Fox's *Journal* must be given. Here Quakerism and Mysticism speak with one voice. Alike in both the faith that God speaks directly to the spirit and that genuine religion is essentially of this first-hand type, is

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taught. The real Presence can be, must be, directly known, and immediately experienced. In every soul there is the witness for God, a Divine Light, which recognised and obeyed cleanses and illuminates and sanctifies. Again and again does Fox thus exhort the people “to come off from all these things”—the mere externals of religion—and directs them “to the Spirit and grace of God in themselves, and to the light of Jesus in their own hearts, that they might come to know Christ, their free teacher, to bring them to salvation, and to open the Scriptures to them.” In another place he writes: “So I preached repentance to the people, and directed them to their inward teacher, Jesus Christ.” Again, we read, “the people were mightily satisfied that they were directed to the Lord’s teaching *in themselves*.”

“I opened Christ’s parables unto them, and directed them to the Spirit of God *in themselves*, that would open the Scriptures unto them.” “To the light of Christ in you I speak.” “The Scriptures were opened to them, and their objections answered. They were directed to the light of Christ, the heavenly man; that by it they might all see their sins, and Christ Jesus to be their Saviour, their Redeemer, their Mediator, and come to feed on Him, the bread of life from heaven.”

This is the ever-recurring note in all his preaching, and it is the very keynote of Quakerism and of Mysticism.

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In the teaching of Fox, while the Inward Light is accepted as absolute in authority, there is yet the necessary correction of subjective revelations by comparison with the Scriptures, and also by conference one with another, and fellowship together in the things of Christ. Upon Scripture his appeal is based, and the interpretation and verification of Scripture is the true work of the Spirit within.

It has to be admitted that Fox himself was not free from serious errors of judgment. He urges, indeed, that the mind should not be let go out from the Spirit of God into their earthly wills, and their own notions. But this did not cover the whole ground.

“Infirmities of judgment and gusts of emotional impulse and nervous exaltation beset the religious enthusiast in his hours of supremest self-devotion as well as in his moments of self-willed wisdom—the imperfections of his human personality intrude themselves even when he is bearing the Cross. The high doctrine of spiritual guidance held by the early Friends did not allow for this” (p. 148).

This frank admission covers a wide ground, but over against any extravagances and unwise actions may be set the singularly sane and practical advice and teaching as to the duties and responsibilities of ordinary life and affairs. The unworldliness of the Quakers, for example, in their conduct of their ordinary avocations, is indeed notable. It was the

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direct vision of God, the experience of “Christ in you,” which made the early Quakers reformers of society, and re-makers of the world.

Thus Quakerism, in its Mysticism, was the very opposite of that dreamy, visionary, impracticable religion, too often associated with the term Mysticism. Indeed the danger, so far as Quakerism is concerned, has been the opposite, that of overlooking or neglecting the Mysticism therein, because of the very practical aspect of the movement. For this reason, I dwell the more upon its spiritual significance.

The witness abundantly supplied in Fox’s *Journal* may be indefinitely supplemented. Here are three additional testimonies. Francis Howgill, leader among the Westmorland Seekers, writes :

“Return home to within: sweep your houses all, the groat is there, the little leaven is there, the grain of mustard seed you will see which the Kingdom of God is like . . . and here you will see your Teacher not removed into a corner, but present when you are upon your beds and about your labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging, and giving peace to all that love and follow Him” (p. 97).

Edward Burrough, one of the earliest of the “Publishers of Quaker Truth,” of whom it is said that “during the ten years of his brief life-work, he never spent one week to himself,” writes : “We

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met together often and waited upon the Lord in pure silence, from our own words and all men's words, and hearkened to the voice of the Lord, and felt His word in our hearts to burn up and beat down all that was contrary to God ; and we obeyed the Light of Christ in us " (p. 130). Isaac Penington —eldest son of Sir Isaac Penington, Lord Mayor, and representative of the City in the Long Parliament —who after prolonged and anxious search, at last found the light, writes :

" Some may desire to know what I have at last met with. I answer, ' I have met with the seed.' Understand that word, and thou wilt be satisfied, and inquire no farther. I have met with my God, I have met with my Saviour, and He hath not been present with me, without His salvation, but I have felt the healings drop upon my soul from under His wings. I have met with the true knowledge, the knowledge of life, the living knowledge, the knowledge which is life ; and this hath had the true virtue in it, which my soul hath rejoiced in, in the presence of the Lord " (p. 505).

The story of the beginnings of Quakerism is full of help in the interpretation of Mysticism. " The Founders of Quakerism were mastered by the conviction that they had discovered God in their own souls, and that they were dealing directly with Him " (*Social Law in the Spiritual World*, p. 147). They had " felt the presence and power of the Most High," and their proclamation was ever of

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this direct and personal experience. But it is not to the Founders alone that we may turn for this witness, for it is of the essence of Quakerism in all its living stages. To impress this truth upon the mind, it is well to study other lives. The personality of George Fox is so strong and individual, and the power of his appeal so forceful, that we are in danger of attributing to the man himself much of his remarkable success.

The best correction will be found in a Quaker of a later age. In *The Journal of John Woolman*, all the essential truths are clearly taught, and in John Woolman himself we find an example of saintliness unsurpassed, even in the annals of Quakerism. "John Woolman's gift was love"—that is the simple and final word. Here are some of the constantly repeated phrases which he uses to express his sense of direct guidance and help. "*I was taught to watch the pure opening ; the opening of truth ; the movings of His Holy Spirit ; a motion of love ; baptised into a feeling sense of all conditions ; I found drawings in my mind ; I found a concern on that account ; I felt a stop in my mind ; my mind was frequently covered with inward prayer.*" These and many other sayings are the more significant because they are simple and unstudied expressions of experience. There is no attempt to explain or justify his words. He speaks as the varying

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circumstances prompt him, in a language all his own. But behind and beneath all there is the confident assurance of direct guidance.

What the conditions of this inward guidance are, and how it is to be sought and discovered, we learn from other sayings. The requirement of *inward stillness* is frequently insisted upon.

“ We were taught by renewed experience to labour for an inward stillness ; at no time to seek for words, but to live in the spirit of truth and utter that to the people which truth opened in us.”

“ The case being new and unexpected, I made no answer suddenly, but sat a time silent, my mind being inward.” “ For several days, my mind was drawn into a deep inward stillness, and being at times covered with the spirit of supplication, my heart was secretly poured out before the Lord.”

“ In these opportunities my mind, through the mercies of the Lord, was kept low in an inward waiting for His help.”

This is the Positive condition, the lowly waiting upon God ; but there is also a Negative condition, the demand of which is equally urgent. Thus he speaks of “ being unclothed of our own wisdom, and knowing the abasement of the creature ” ; of watching diligently “ against the motions of self in my own mind ” ; of the danger of “ looking at the example of others ” ; of the necessity of depending “ upon the daily instructions of Christ,” rather than “ upon a concern ” previously felt.

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But the first and fundamental requirement is that of detachment from all outward gains and honours. This all the Mystics insist upon. For many it meant the withdrawal altogether from all the activities of social and business life. For John Woolman it meant the relinquishing of what promised to be a prosperous business career. "The way to large business appeared open, but I felt a stop in my mind," he writes. "I saw that an humble man, with the blessing of the Lord, might live on a little, and that, where the heart was set on greatness, success in business did not satisfy the craving; but that commonly, with an increase of wealth, the desire of wealth increased." Relinquishing his trading, he worked as a tailor—by himself and without apprentice; and cultivated "a nursery of apple trees." It was thus out of his own life he could urge upon others to "dwell in humility; and take heed that no views of outward gain get too deep hold of you, that so, your eyes being single to the Lord, you may be preserved in the way of safety." This may sound in our ears as "a counsel of perfection," impossible of attainment. But he does not urge his way of life upon all. How the truth within will work in other lives he sees clearly, and here his words have guidance for us :

"If Friends who have known the truth, keep in

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that tenderness of heart where all views of outward gain are given up, and their trust is only in the Lord, He will graciously lead some to be patterns of deep self-denial in things relating to trade and handicraft labour ; and others who have plenty of the treasures of this world will be examples of a plain frugal life, and pay wages to such as they may hire, more liberally than is now customary in some places.”

In John Woolman’s religious experience Love is the one inspiring life-principle. “ When we love God with all our heart and with all our strength, in this love we love our neighbour as ourselves ; and a tenderness of heart is felt towards all people for whom Christ died.” To him was given to see that cruelty to animals was a sin against God. “ I believe,” he writes, “ where the love of God is verily perfected, and the true spirit of government watchfully attended to, a tenderness towards all creatures made subject to us will be experienced, and a care felt in us that we do not lessen that sweetness of life in the animal creation, which the great Creator intends for them under our government.” In another passage the influence of the love and reverence of God is widened to include all God’s works : “ As the mind is moved by an inward principle to love God as an invisible incomprehensible Being, so by the same principle it is moved to love Him in all His manifestations in the visible world.”

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Though there are many references to “inward prayer,” yet we find no prayer for special personal favours. He was, to use his own words, “mixed with his fellow-creatures in their misery, and could not consider himself a distinct and separate being.” How close this identification of himself with others was is evidenced by his concern for their well-being. Very early in his life he came to the conclusion that slave-keeping was “a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion.” This was his great burden, his life-long testimony. With surprising gentleness he laid his message before the Friends, making many and long journeys for this purpose. When entertained by slave-holding planters, he declined to receive as a gift food and lodging which to him were the gain of oppression ; he either left the pay for his entertainment to be distributed amongst the slaves, or gave it them himself. Through the labours of Woolman, slavery was at last cast out from Quaker circles, and through this action, in great measure the final work of Emancipation was begun. “These are the souls for whom Christ died, and for our conduct towards them we must answer before Him who is no respecter of persons”—such was Woolman’s testimony.

It is not possible to cover the whole ground of Woolman’s activities and “concerns” for the good of men. Enough has been said to prove beyond

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question that in his case "following the inward light" did not mean mere subjectiveness. The union of spiritual religion and active philanthropy for which Quakerism through all its history has stood is the practical Mysticism we need to-day. In all the Churches there is the activity, ever more and more developing. What is lacking is the spirituality, the waiting upon God, the inward inspiration, the motive power. It is this which Mysticism stands for. "Be still and know that I am God" is the message to the Churches, as to the individual. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

CHAPTER XIII

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF THE SOUL

THE fact of Divine Inspiration is an integral part of Religious Mysticism. With one voice the Mystics declare that they have experienced "the inspiration of the Holy Spirit," cleansing, spiritualising, quickening the whole life in love and in service. In that experience the Holy Spirit is "no mere influence, derived, secondary, impersonal and vanishing, but is no other than God Himself in vital contact and communication with the spirits of men whom He has made." This is the Christian Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as taught by all the great leaders of Christian thought. Hence any and every writer on the work of the Spirit is and must be essentially mystical.

This is well illustrated in the truly great book of Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, in which, as it has been said, there is "asserted for all time the inwardness and spirituality of true religion." This is his statement of the simple yet profound Christian truth :

"The Scriptures represent the Holy Spirit not only as moving and occasionally influencing the

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saints, but as dwelling in them as His temple, His proper abode, and everlasting dwelling-place. And He is represented as being so united to the faculties of the soul, that He becomes there a principle of new nature and life."

Here then is the justification of Dr. Moberly's assertion that if all Christians had but understood and lived up to their professed belief in the Holy Spirit "they would all have been Mystics: or in other words, there would have been no Mysticism" (*Atonement and Personality*, p. 316). For all, the truth remains, not only as the truth of Mysticism, but as the truth of vital religion: "God is no otherwise your God, but as He is the God of your life, manifested in it: and He can be no otherwise the God of your life but as His Spirit is living within you" (*William Law, Letters*).

Once and again we have been brought face to face with a possible objection to this high doctrine, which demands fuller discussion. I refer to the theory that the thoughts, impulses, emotions which spring up into conscious life, and which are counted "fruits of the Spirit," may be but the incursions from the deeper, hidden life of the soul itself, and therefore, that self suggestions are mistaken for Divine inspirations. This objection I propose now to consider.

The doctrine of the Sub-conscious, though now taught by all psychologists, is yet in the experimental stage. In a memorial notice of F. W. H.

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Myers, highly appreciative in its tone, William James wrote :

" For half a century now psychologists have fully admitted the existence of a sub-liminal mental region under the name either of unconscious cerebration or of the involuntary life ; but they have never definitely taken up the question of the extent of this region, never sought explicitly to map it out. Myers definitely attacks this problem, which, after him, it will be impossible to ignore."

In his last publication, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, which, to the regret of all students, he did not live to complete and finally revise, Myers uses the suggestive analogy of the visible solar spectrum beyond each end of which there are ether waves of which our eyes have no cognisance. So consciousness, the ordinary mentality of normal life, has its spectrum, at both ends of which there are activities, mysterious, unmeasured. Beyond the *lower end*, where consciousness merges into mere organic operation, there are organic processes not subject to *normal* control which make the very foundation of our physical being, and beyond the *higher end*, where consciousness merges into reverie or ecstasy, there are mental activities, mysterious, transcendental, which occasionally emerge into " that supra-liminal current of consciousness which we habitually identify with ourselves."

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This is not the ancient doctrine of the divided soul—Plato’s “chariot-soul,” drawn by two horses pulling different ways—the Jacob-Israel character, in which two natures wrestle for mastery—St. Paul’s law in the members warring against the law of the mind—Tennyson’s two voices, doubt and faith, fear and hope—Clough’s Dipsychus, the tender conscience and the world-spirit in conflict—Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. This inner conflict is known in some measure by all men. Perfect unity of personality is not a present possession. Even our self-knowledge is very partial—knowledge of self in detachments as it were, different and varying sides of a many-sided self. No man is always at his best. We know ourselves, and are known to others, as often inconsistent. In those moments when we are drawn by strong conflicting impulses we seem broken into fragments. “In your patience ye shall win your souls,” is a saying full of significance. Not alone by external attractions and antagonisms, but even more by inward impulses and inclinations, we are pulled in different directions, and only as we hold fast to one worthy, centralising interest can we attain strong and stable character. In a large sense, covering the many activities of life, “getting and spending we lay waste our powers.” Self-direction along a chosen path, and concentration of our powers, the detachment and

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attachment of the Mystics, is the law of all noble life.

It is not, however, a doctrine of two selves, a higher and a lower, which we are considering, but the doctrine that the self of which we are normally conscious is only a part, perhaps a small part, of the true self or soul, so that "no self of which we can here have cognisance is in reality more than a fragment of a larger self—revealed in a fashion at once shifting and limited, through an organisation not so framed as to afford it full manifestation."

It is not necessary to follow Myers through the manifold evidences he adduces in support of this doctrine. That intelligent operations take place below the waking consciousness is a familiar experience. There is "unconscious rumination," an "unconscious mental process of digestion and assimilation." Men of genius confess that their best was not theirs in any consciously purposive sense. It was given to them ; it flashed upon them. They cannot reproduce or match at will their greatest works. It was a tide of the spirit, a gift of the larger self, "an uprush of the sub-liminal." On a higher plane, Myers instances the "Demon" of Socrates, the sudden emergence of an inward authority as guidance in practical life, a voice of restraint, which, from childhood, had been a controlling influence in his life ; and the voices and

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visions of Joan of Arc, all calling to the purest heroism, from the first summons in her girlhood to be good, to the great deeds of her womanhood.

The step from these experiences to the inward guidance and illumination of the Mystics is easy, and the question is urgent—how are we to distinguish, is it possible to distinguish, between self-prompted thoughts and the word of God? What is the relation of the doctrine of the sub-liminal to conversion and inspiration, and to the mystical experience generally? For, let it be again stated, the sub-conscious is not the mere store-chamber of past mental activities. There is active mental work done of which we are not immediately conscious, and the possibility of the emergence into full consciousness of thoughts and impulses which have their origin in that hidden life of the soul must be reckoned with.

Whatever may be our final conclusion, one thing is certain—we must give to this larger self work to do, and opportunities of making itself actively known. If no other fact were known to us than this—that in the sub-conscious are all our stores of memory, the duty of letting the mind turn in, as it were, upon itself would be clear. But the fact goes far beyond this. There are mental activities of a surprising richness, almost compelling us to believe that the sub-liminal is “the more real and more

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noble, more comprehensive, more intelligent self, of which the supra-liminal development is but a natural and healthy and partial manifestation." The mystic call to meditation "to enter the silence," to shut close the doors of the senses that thoughts and visions not sense-born may arise, has, so far at least, a psychological basis. True there is a morally higher and lower in the hidden life, as in the conscious. An "uprush of the sub-liminal" may be an uprush of animal instincts and passions, which are never wholly subjected. It is, however, only the undisciplined mind which is carried away by unreasoning impulses, and self-discipline is included in the Mystic's call to meditation. It is to the "spiritually minded" that the call to "enter the silence" is addressed, and "he that is spiritual judgeth all things."

How this principle of self-communion may act is well illustrated in the case of Woolman. His words have already been quoted, but they well repay more careful study. An official request was made to him "to provide lodging and entertainment for two soldiers, and that six shillings a week per man would be allowed as pay for it." Believing, as he did, that "wars are inconsistent with the purity of the Christian religion," he was placed in a difficulty. He describes his action thus: "The case being new and unexpected, I made no answer suddenly, but

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sat a time silent, my mind being inward." The issue is not the point before us, though it is exceedingly interesting. His reply was, " If the men are sent here for entertainment, I believe I shall not refuse to admit them into my house, but the nature of the case is such that I expect I cannot keep them on hire." This was his idea of what he speaks of as " a passive obedience to authority." Now, assuming that this *inwardness of mind* was an appeal to the sub-liminal, to the wisdom of his own deeper self, the method was justified by the result, and is an object lesson for many of us who impulsively rush into speech on any provocation. To give time for the inner workings of thought is surely wise. Indeed there is wisdom in the familiar advice, " to sleep on it," for there are activities of sleep, mental activities other than our foolish dreams would imply. " Drafts upon the energy of the spiritual world," so sleep has been described. How otherwise can we account for its strange reparative powers, and its resultant clearness of thought ?

In other ways the possible emergence of the sub-conscious finds illustration. The power of mind over body is now generally admitted. Out of this has arisen many systems and cults. Healing by " suggestion " is now taught and practised ; and " suggestion," in the words of William James, " is only a name for a successful appeal to the sub-liminal

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consciousness." The curative phenomena of hypnosis, as certified by well-qualified medical practitioners, afford remarkable evidence of the power of that deeper current of mental life. After much experimenting it is found that all the ways of inducing the hypnotic state can be reduced to that of suggestion, and, in the final analysis, to self-suggestion, the appeal to the sub-liminal self, either by the practitioner or by the subject himself, for self-hypnotism is common. A study of hypnotism impresses one with the importance of cultivating "suggestion," of insisting to one's self upon the ends desired, of summoning to one's aid all the energies of the soul, thus using to the full whatever powers lie hidden within. Two different currents of mental life are ours, one deeper, and the other shallower, and the appeal to the deeper is best made while the usual active mentality is in abeyance. This much of psychological truth is there in the Mystic's "Stillness."

But, it will be urged, are there not dangers in this teaching? What of the strange medley of phenomena, illusions, hallucinations, and what not, which are associated with hypnotism—strange phenomena indeed, associated not only with hypnotism, but also with Mysticism. Here, as in all else in life, the test principle is, "by their fruits ye shall know them." All human faculties have their

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aberrations, but not therefore do we despise or denounce them. The ruling power is ours to discern between the morally higher and lower. "If the *fruits for life* of the state of conversion are good, we ought to idealise and venerate it, even though it be a principle of natural psychology; if not, we ought to make short work with it, no matter what supernatural being may have infused it"—so wrote William James, and that, as it seems to me, is after all the final word.

I have dwelt somewhat fully upon this doctrine of the sub-conscious, the more to accentuate the importance of the question as to the relation of this doctrine to the mystical experience. Is "the inward light" a higher life of the soul itself, or is it, as the Scriptures declare, the Indwelling Spirit?

One answer to this question has arrested wide attention. In a recent publication Dr. Sanday has suggested, as a tentative theory, that "the proper seat or *locus* of all divine indwelling, or divine action upon the human soul, is the sub-liminal consciousness" (*Christologies Ancient and Modern*, p. 159). This statement in the text is qualified in a foot-note:

"Some stress is laid upon 'proper,' for which I might almost have written 'primary.' I do not, of course, mean to deny that this divine element makes itself felt, and at times directly felt in consciousness. But it seems to come up (as it were)

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unto consciousness, as if from some lower and deeper sphere."

This theory has been subjected to much adverse criticism, and some confusion has arisen through a misunderstanding of the special terms *lower* and *higher*. Thus it has been suggested that we should use the term super-consciousness, rather than sub-consciousness, for all that is morally good, as though a *moral* quality was implied in the terms, which of course is not the case. The sub-conscious includes all activities "closed off from the ordinary waking consciousness."

Dr. Sanday's theory is worthy of serious consideration. It has been anticipated, in part, by William James, who wrote :

"Just as our primary wide-awake consciousness throws open our senses to the touch of things material, so it is logically conceivable that *if there be* higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of their doing so *might be* our possession of a sub-conscious region which alone should yield access to them. The hubbub of the waking life might close a door which in the dreamy Subliminal might remain ajar or open" (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 242).

This is the cautious, balanced statement of a psychologist, not the less important on that account. Myers goes much further ; for to him "the super-normal faculties of the sub-liminal take us into the cosmic environment." Here the spiritual world is

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open to us, "upon which we are enabled to make drafts of power by virtue of our connection with our sub-liminal."

That influences other than those consciously recognised enter into and mould life and character is indeed certain. Not a little of what is attributed to heredity is, in reality, due to these unnoticed but potent influences. The influences of mind on mind are far too subtle to be tabulated—unconscious influences, alike in the agent and in the recipient. Thought-transference is no mere dream theory. If, then, from those about us in the visible world, spiritual influences enter our lives, and we can touch one another in the hidden depths of the soul, it is surely reasonable to conclude that Divine influences may penetrate our lives, influences other and richer than we are consciously aware of.

We recognise this in our moral judgments. That they are *our* judgments we must assert, but that is not the final word. In all our highest moral moments there is a sense of authority above and beyond the self. At the lowest, we infer God from our sense of moral obligation. The very absoluteness of duty implies a higher authority that is claiming us. That a soul should be haunted by the shame of its own wrong-doing, that all self-excusing and special pleadings should avail not at all to silence the condemning voice, is all a dark mystery unless a

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Greater than self is striving within, and searching the most secret life. And in the opposite experiences, when, having taken a firm stand in righteousness, we find that opposition and condemnation of our fellows result, how other than as the approval of a Higher than they can we account for the inward peace and confidence which remain unmoved by the storm about us? So is it also in all our highest and best. Those finest impulses, those flashes of moral insight, those movements of kindness and pity, of generosity and charity, which surprise ourselves, and bow the soul in reverence and obedience, whence do they come? The treasure-house of these joys cannot be the sub-liminal self—they spring from a Diviner source, and are linked with “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

The recognition of this Divine Influence is of the very essence of Mysticism. The Christian Mystics believed and knew that the Apostolic teaching is the very truth of God and of life—“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control,” and this, as no mere influence, working upon the soul, but as an Indwelling Spirit, communicating His own nature. This is the true mystical experience—conscious fellowship with God. “I have met with my God”—such is the testimony. In the words of William Law :

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“With the same self-evident certainty as you know that you think, and are alive, you know that there is goodness, love, benevolence, meekness, compassion, wisdom, peace, joy. Now this is the self-evident God, that forces Himself to be known, and found, and felt, in every man, in the same certainty of self-evidence as every man feels and finds his own thoughts and life.”

It may be that the mystical faith of the Divine element in human nature itself has to be included in the doctrine of the sub-liminal. There, in that innermost depth of the soul’s essential life is the “seed,” the “spark” Divine. But this truth is the necessary inference from the experience of direct and personal fellowship with God. Only as God and man are of one spiritual nature is such communion possible. The fruit of the Spirit must be spiritual fruit, and can only issue from a spiritual nature. If there is an essential difference in *kind* between the human and the Divine then the words become absolute truth: “God is great and we know Him not.” Man can only really know one nature, his own, and it is and must be from true self-knowledge, knowledge of the true self, that we rise to the knowledge of what God is.

The one final appeal, then, must be to life. This, as we have seen, was the test of the Mystics for all supposed Divine visions and voices. Nothing that enfeebles the will, clouds the judgment, deadens

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moral sensibility, can be of God. Communion with God must result in an intensifying of all that is best and noblest. "Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as by action." Not only of the teaching of Jesus recorded in Scripture, but of every word of God to the individual, the life test must be applied: "If any man willetteth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself." In the obedience of life all Divine inspirations must verify themselves. Only in their fruits is it possible to compare spiritual things with spiritual. "How shall I know," asks William Penn, "that a man does not obtrude his own sense upon us as the infallible Spirit?" His answer is "By the same Spirit." Every gracious leading of the Spirit consists in two things: "partly in instructing a person in his duty by the Spirit, and partly in powerfully inducing him to comply with that instruction"—so wrote Edwards, enforcing the test of obedience.

Here, once again, we see the essential place of the Christian Scriptures, and of the Church as the great company of the saints, in Religious Mysticism. In the life and teaching of Jesus, and the Christian experience of His first disciples, we have the source of our religion, not indeed to override, but to perfect our own experience. The life of the Vine is to be the very life of all the branches, and in all our

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interpretation of Scripture, and in all our religious life, we should be guided by the unfoldings of truth in the saintly lives of all ages. The Christian fellowship is essential to the Christian life. No worthy life is possible in isolation, religious life least of all. We are members one of another. All feelings are deepened and enriched by contact with others who share them. Our most assured convictions receive added sanction as we recognise them as the controlling faiths of others. While, then, for the cultivation of a devout and sensitive spirit times of silence and solitude are essential, yet for the fulness of attainment and assurance there must be fellowship one with another. Failure in either direction is fatal to the possession of the Fulness of the Spirit.

To-day, as surely as in any former age, God speaks. Revelation is not a bygone story. Inspiration is not of Hebrew Prophet and Psalmist, or of Christian Apostle alone. God has withdrawn from no nearness into which He has ever come to men. It is the listening ear, the lowly mind, the waiting spirit and the obedience of life which are lacking in us. The multiplicity of our activities is endangering our spiritual life, and must do so, unless our activities are the promptings and expression of our secret life with God. Then, indeed, we become practical Mystics, living a twofold life—the life of communion

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with God in spirit and in truth, and the life of the service of man inspired by love—twofold, yet, even as the two great commandments, one in inner meaning and one in that unified spiritual life which is the very Kingdom of God.

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CHAPTER XIV

ASCETICISM

IT is not possible to overlook the essential place which self-discipline holds in the life of the Mystics, and frequent reference has been made thereto, as the special matter under consideration seemed to demand. But the importance of the subject, and the prevalence of serious misunderstanding, alike of Asceticism itself, and of its relation to Mysticism, call for fuller and separate treatment.

An Ascetic is defined as “ one who retires from the customary business of life, and devotes himself to the duties of piety and devotion ; one who practises excessive rigour and self-denial in religious things—a hermit, a recluse.” The terms Ascetic and Mystic are by no means synonyms for one and the same type of life. There have been many Ascetics who were not Mystics, but every Mystic is, in a true sense, an Ascetic, indeed the dictionary definition as above given could be justified from the annals of Mysticism. What has been written of Asceticism is equally true of some phases of Mysticism :

“ The times of revived asceticism are periods of natural disorder and social disruption. Gentle and

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thoughtful souls found world-flight the only seeming refuge amidst the wrecks of all that makes life really attractive, and in the extreme symbolic self-renunciation of self-torture the only hope for the devoted lives of those who saw the evil" (*Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, "Asceticism").

That there have been Mystics whose discipline of the body amounted even to extreme torture, is indeed the case, as we shall see; but this is the very opposite of the truth regarding others, and just as we reject, as pure assumption, the definition of Mysticism in terms of its abnormal phases, so we refuse to define Asceticism by its extreme forms. As, in ancient Greece, Asceticism meant the discipline undergone by athletes while training, so, in the early Christian centuries, the word was used for the physical and moral discipline of the Christian who would "run the race" and "fight the good fight," and "win the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

It is not necessary to consider the place and power of Asceticism in all religions and in all worthy life, but there are fundamental facts of experience which should not be forgotten. The intimate and subtle connection between over-indulgence of bodily appetites and sloth, physical, mental, and spiritual, is an old world experience, and some measure of self-denial, some contradiction of natural desires, has ever been found necessary for any high achievement.

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The self-discipline, physical and in a measure moral, which has made possible, and must accompany, great proficiency in our national games, is a matter of common knowledge. The same principle rules for all attainments, and most expressly, in the life of the Spirit. The deliberate judgment of a great psychologist, whose study of human life and thought, and whose knowledge of affairs, were alike profound, may be accepted as the simple and final truth of life : "Representatively and symbolically, and apart from the vagaries into which the unenlightened intellect of former times may have let it wander, asceticism must, I believe, be acknowledged to go with the profounder way of handling the gift of existence" (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 364).

Such then, as it seems to me, is the spirit which moves and controls the religious Ascetic. He takes life seriously, seeing the goal, and the hindrances, the dangers and the foes to be encountered in the way ; and every step must be taken, every life-movement controlled, by faith in the supreme value and abiding joy of the spiritual and eternal realities. For him, the mortifications of self, the crossings of natural desires, the refusals of even innocent delights, are in order that he may engage in the fuller and richer activities of the moral and spiritual man.

This is Asceticism at its best, and in its highest

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exercise. Historically considered, however, we have to include under this term all grades of severity from simple abstinence as in fastings, to the most painful forms of bodily torture which a misdirected ingenuity could devise. There are writers who use stronger words of censure of the terrible penances which even Christian Mystics have inflicted upon themselves ; and others, who would be charitable in their judgments, think and speak of these acts as those of madmen ; indeed the charge of insanity is made to cover a wider field, as in this quotation :

“ It is not now difficult for the modern psychiatrist to recognise in the standard saints’ stories of the Middle Ages many impulses familiar to him from his experience in the Insane Hospital, but which were, of course, at that time regarded only as evidence of piety and distinguished fellowship with God.” (*Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, “ Asceticism ”).

It is true that in the records of Asceticism we meet with manifestations which agree, in form, with those of the Insane Hospitals, but the conclusion that these Ascetics were therefore insane would be surely a very hasty judgment. Caution is always necessary in drawing inferences as to springs of action from the action itself, since identical outward acts often have wholly dissimilar motives. In the *impulses* of the insane, to which the writer refers, there is admittedly no *moral* element—in the

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corresponding impulses of the saint there may be the very highest moral purpose. True the saint may mistake his own impulses for the Divine will, but if he is acting upon the highest and best as known to him, then, while we may judge his act unwise, we dare not condemn the doer.

A good illustration of what I mean is found in the life of St. Catherine of Genoa, who endured severe self-imposed penances "so that all her senses were mortified." Asked why she did these things she said: "I do not know, but I feel myself drawn inwardly to do this . . . and I think it is God's will." St. Catherine, as we have seen, was a woman of remarkable energy and business ability, and no one who reads the story of her life can tolerate even the suspicion of insanity in her case. We must take her words to mean just what they say, and conclude that she acted in simple obedience to the highest impulses which controlled all her wonderful life.

This consideration of the conscious motive and end must guide our judgment even when we are face to face with the most extreme cases of self-discipline. A typical example is found in the life of Henry Suso (1300—1365), who, in his insatiable love of pain and suffering, subjected himself to an unrelenting martyrdom extending over almost a quarter of a century. The story of his austerities is too long and too painful for recapitulation here. As an instance of unbalanced

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and excessive Asceticism, Suso is pre-eminent amongst Christian Mystics, and yet, in his case also, the charge of insanity has no justification whatsoever. All was done deliberately, in order, as he tells us in his autobiography, that he might "conquer the lively nature of his youth" and that he might know in full reality "the fellowship of Christ's sufferings." The acts of Suso can only be understood, and must certainly be judged, from his own standpoint, and not from ours. When the whole story of his life is known, and all that he was and did is before us, we shall not withhold our reverence :

"The spirit of kindly love, the passion for the redemption of sinners, the utter loss of selfish interest, the sweet consciousness of Divine love, and the complete obedience of will to the heavenly leading which mark this Friend of God, must cover for us the blindness and error which were mainly due to his intellectual environment and to the subtle influences of suggestion" (*Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 291).

In the lives of other Mystics, and especially in their teaching, Asceticism assumes a far more inward form. The self-discipline remains severe, but it is directed to the complete spiritualising of thought, affection and will. St. John of the Cross may be taken as our type of this Asceticism, for though his own observance of the stricter Rule of the Carmelite Order, which he entered at the age of twenty-one,

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would doubtless involve what we should count austerities, yet he does not dwell upon these in his writings, but rather upon the "subduing of our desires." For this he gives definite "instructions," which may be thus summarised :

The imitation of Christ, and in order thereto, meditation upon His Life.

"To do this well, every satisfaction offered to the senses, which is not for God's honour and glory, must be renounced and rejected for the love of Jesus Christ."

"In order to mortify and calm the four natural passions of joy, hope, fear, and grief," he adds these "instructions" :

"Strive always, not after that which is most easy, but after that which is most difficult."

"Not after that which is most pleasant, but after that which is most unpleasant."

"Not after that which is consoling, but after that which is afflictive."

"Not after that which ministers repose, but after that which ministers labour."

"Not after great things, but after little things."

"Strive not to desire anything, but rather nothing."

"Seek not after that which is better, but after that which is worse, and desire to be detached from all things, empty and poor for Christ's sake" (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 56f.).

Whatever judgment may be passed upon these directions, their intention is evident and the aim lofty. To be conformed to the likeness of Christ, every thought brought into captivity to His

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obedience, and all life's activities inspired and controlled by His Spirit, such was the ideal of St. John of the Cross, and it is Christianity.

I have already called attention to the fact that many of the great Mystics were members of one or other of the Monastic Orders. As these Orders, in great part at least, arose as a protest against the increasing worldliness of the Church, it is only what we should expect that their Rules should be formulated with the definite purpose of cultivating self-mortification. In some Orders, it is true, there are no prescribed bodily penances beyond what may be covered by the threefold vow of Chastity, Obedience, and Poverty, but in others severe austerities are enjoined—for such they appear to us, though it may well be that what appeals to us as very distressing may not have been accounted excessive privation in a former age. But monastic life, even under the strictest Orders, could not secure freedom from searching temptations, and each faithful soul had still to work out its own salvation, and exercise its own self-discipline.

The Recluse, especially, did accomplish the flight from the world, but it was only from the world without, not by any means from the greater spiritual world within, where every battle has to be fought and the victory won. The Confessions of a Recluse written, as St. Augustine wrote, in all sincerity of

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self-revealing, would unveil spiritual conflicts upon which we could only gaze in reverent awe. Even The Lady Julian, Anchoress at Norwich, whose singularly pure and feeble selfhood must have spared her the severity of many conflicts, has to fight against "despair or doubtful dread," "sloth and losing of time," "unreasoning heaviness and vain sorrow," the sins of Accidie, that insidious spiritual malady which saintly men in all ages have known. Julian does not tell us how she overcame her besetting sins, indeed she had no word of ascetic counsel, but only of the "Revelations of Divine Love" to her. Was this of design; did she realise all needed strength and freedom in her visions of Love? We may well believe it was even thus in her experience, and that she tells her visions in the hope that others may share her joy. "The love of Christ constraineth us"—the Love which Christ reveals and is, and the answering love He quickens in us—in this joy of love is victory and peace.

This I believe to be the final word and witness of the Christian Mystics, the inspiring and regulating wisdom in all Christian Asceticism, the beginning and the end of "The Mystic Way."

I do not say there are to be no "mortifications of our members," no urgent calls to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." This is not the teaching of the Mystics, and could not be in face of the

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facts of all Christian experience. What, however, some of the Mystics do realise is, that direct attack is not the surest way to victory, that the real enemy is in the soul itself, and can only be conquered by Holy Love. This is the teaching of the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, or as the edition before me is titled, *The Divine Cloud*. One passage, in which the cleansing and enriching power of love is contrasted with ascetic practices, may be given :

“ Fast thou never so much, watch thou never so long, rise thou never so early, lie thou never so hard, wear thou never so rough garments, put out thine eyes, if it were lawful (as indeed it is *not*), cut out thy tongue, stop thine ears and nose never so fast, cut off also thy members if the law of God would bear it (as in truth it will not), put thy body to all the pain and penance that thou canst devise; and all that shall avail thee little or nothing. For when thou hast done all that thou canst do, yet will the stirring and rising of sin remain in thee. Yea (and which is more), weep thou never so much for sorrow for thy sins, or else for the Passion of Christ, have thou never so much mind of the joys of heaven, and of the glory of all the holy Angels and Saints, what shall it help or avail thee? Undoubtedly much good, much help, much profit, and much grace shalt thou win by that exercise. But in comparison of this blind stirring of love, all is but little that is done, or may be done, without this. . . . This not only destroyeth the ground and root of sin, but also getteth all virtues.”

It is interesting to note that this unnamed Mystic

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of the fourteenth century saw the truth which Browning has so beautifully expressed :

Let us not always say
 “Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!”
 As the bird wings and sings,
 Let us cry, “All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps
 soul!”

This is what the Mystic writes : “ God forbid that I should separate what God hath joined together, to wit, the body and the spirit.” And again : “ Whoso had this work it would govern him full seemly, as well in body as in soul, and make him graceful to the eye of each man or woman that looked upon him.” In this thought we have the negation of all the extreme forms of Asceticism, in bodily self-torture. This, also, is the teaching of Father Baker, who wrote a Preface and Notes to *The Divine Cloud*. In his own Directions, compiled from “ more than forty treatises ” by his contemporary Father Cressy, and given to the world under the title *Holy Wisdom*, Asceticism is essentially moral and spiritual. “ The only subject of mortification,” he writes, “ are our affections, and not any other faculties but only in order to our affections.” He speaks also of mortifying the passions “ by transcending them, that is, by elevating and uniting the spirit to God.” Hence, “ prayer is in itself the most exalted and effectual

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mortification." His knowledge of life leads him to conclude that "the mortifications which come in the natural course of life" will provide all that is needful for the soul's discipline.

The truth that Divine Love is the one effective cleansing energy, has, as its correlative truth, the fact that *self* is the one corrupting agent, that selflessness is the one all-inclusive sin, and self can only be mortified as love reigns. This, I think, is the root idea in the *Imitation*, and in the *Theologia Germanica*, and in this doctrine of Love and of Sin the Mystics do but teach the pure Christian truth, and bid us return to the fountain-head of spiritual direction in the Christian Scriptures.

The one saying of the Lord, upon which all Christian Asceticism, and, indeed, Christian Mysticism itself, is based, is reported by St. Mark thus: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it." By some of the Mystics, as by many devout Christians in our own day, this searching condition of true discipleship of Christ has been confused and misapplied. The intensity and comprehensiveness of the teaching have been obscured by its applications to particular acts and duties, as though Jesus said, "Deny thyself this or

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that"—“take up this or that cross.” This is not the meaning of the Divine word.. It is the *self* that is to be denied, self-will, self-pride, self-pleasing, self as life’s centre and ruling principle, and this, unto the final test of obedience, unto the taking up of the cross. The disciples’ love and loyalty to Christ is to be unto the uttermost, unto the carrying of the cross to the place of crucifixion, “obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.” Such complete self-renunciation is possible only in the joy of love, for Love’s sake, “for My sake.” He only, who has seen His Glory, can ever be thus “faithful unto death,” but that vision realised, the heart and mind and will, the whole man, is thenceforward “the bond-servant of Jesus Christ.”

In the Teaching of Jesus, as it has so often to be insisted, there are no rules for conduct given, but life principles only. Of course this does not mean that there *is* no right conduct, but that each of His followers is left to determine what this is in the light of the ruling principle. Even so, the truth that the real mortification is of *the self*, does not mean that there are no individual acts of self-denial. The life of St. Paul, as revealed to us in his Letters, is the best corrective of this possible misrepresentation. In his example and teaching we find the fullest enforcement, and the just limitations of Christian Asceticism.

Asceticism

The mortifications which St. Paul experienced in the course of his great life-work might well be deemed sufficient to fulfil the requirements of the severest self-discipline, and yet he writes : “ Every man that striveth in the games is temperate in all things. . . . I buffet my body and bring it into bondage.”

He who, as a spiritual athlete, subjects himself to bodily training that he may win the prize of perfect Christ-likeness is thereby justified in saying to others : “ Mortify your members which are upon the earth.” “ Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” “ If ye live after the flesh, ye must die ; but if by the spirit ye mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

This opposition to, and suppression of, bodily desires, does not arise out of any false dualism, any doctrine of the inherent evil of man’s physical nature, as some forms of Speculative Mysticism imply, but from the great faith that the body itself is to be presented “ a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” “ Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ ? ” “ Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you ? ”

The sublimest truths are thus linked by the Apostle with the common duties and acts of the physical life, and with the crossing or exercising of natural desires. This is the spring of all true self-

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discipline and wise “mortifications,” and a life thus animated and controlled will reach the goal. “Walk by the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” “They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.”

Here, then, we reach our final conclusion. All that is helpful and obligatory in Christian Asceticism is bound up inseparably with the central truths of Christian Mysticism, the faith of the Divine Indwelling, the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, the Love of God, the life which is “hid with Christ in God.”

CHAPTER XV

THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

IN his lectures on "The Historic Faith," Bishop Westcott wrote: "The belief in the Holy Spirit is characteristic of our Christian creed." "We are all now living under that dispensation which is essentially the dispensation of the Spirit. *Our whole attitude towards the fact of life is determined by the devout conviction with which we hold it.*" The sentence which I have emphasised is very far-reaching in its force and applications. Between belief, which may be mere formal assent, and devout conviction, which is ever life-controlling, there is a difference which may include the extremes of irreligion and the most saintly life.

"I believe in the Holy Ghost" is the confessed faith of the Christian Church, but, after the earliest centuries, there is little evidence of any "devout conviction." Can we hope for the revival of the Church's faith; is this the direction in which our thoughts are tending? The conception of the Divine Immanence, the nearness of God, the kinship of God and man, are truths which are now enforced. Much serious thought must precede any

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reconstruction of Christian Doctrine, but already the thoughts of many are bearing fruit in a new faith in the reality of the Spiritual, and in a richer “communion of the Holy Ghost.”

In the Christian Scriptures in this, as in all vital religion, we shall find our surest guidance and help, and for this reason I have thought it well to conclude this series of essays with a brief study of the place which the Holy Spirit held in the life and teaching of St. Paul. It is not my purpose to attempt to formulate a doctrine of the Spirit from the Apostle’s writings, if indeed they contain any doctrine as such. Written, as his letters for the most part were, to meet special needs, and expressed in the unstudied language of experience, it is increasingly recognised that exposition of doctrine was no essential part of the Apostle’s purpose in writing. His belief in the Holy Ghost was indeed convinced and central alike in his own personal life, and in his teaching, but it is by no means easy, if indeed it is even possible, to determine what his belief was as to the Spirit’s nature.

This element of uncertainty—or shall we say comprehensiveness?—in St. Paul’s thought finds illustration in the names and titles he uses. Thus in the four Letters, Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and Galatians, the simple term “the Spirit” occurs most frequently; indeed, in Galatians this is

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almost uniformly the case. In Romans, and the Corinthian Letters, we have "the Holy Spirit," "the Spirit of God." So far the Apostle follows the Old Testament usage, and we might conclude that his standpoint was that of the older faith, in which the Spirit of God corresponds to the spirit of man, the term being used to express "the fulness of vital power, and all the activities of vital energy, whether, as we might say, emotional, or intellectual, or moral—whether temporary or permanent" (*The Theology of the Old Testament*, A. B. Davidson, LL.D., p. 119).

The wider study of St. Paul's teaching will show how inadequate and misleading such a representation of his thought would be, though it has to be admitted that in one passage (1 Cor. ii. 11) there is some justification for the conclusion. The more distinctively Christian element in his thought, which fills the term "Spirit" with all that is expressly and definitely personal, is found in almost all that the Apostle wrote.

In this connection, there is one very remarkable usage of terms by the Apostle which must not be overlooked. He writes: "Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. iii. 17), and in the following verse: "the Lord the Spirit." This identification of the Spirit with the exalted Christ is probably

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based upon the Apostle's personal experience ; this is what the Spirit meant in his life, conscious fellowship with the Lord. Nor does this passage stand alone. The indwelling of the Spirit of God, the possession of the Spirit of Christ, "Christ in you," are spoken of together as, apparently at least, identical (Rom. viii. 9—10). In another Letter he speaks of "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 19). The Trinity of the Apostle's faith was essentially a practical and personal experience. "Through Christ we have access in one Spirit unto the Father." All is of God, and all ends in God. Whether through Christ, or by the Holy Spirit, it is ever "God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure."

In our study of the mind of the Apostle, it will prove helpful to classify his teaching under definite heads, not at all by way of formulating a system of thought, but simply for greater convenience and fulness of treatment.

(1) *The Indwelling Spirit.*—To the faith that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," there must be added the faith : God is in man transforming the spirit which man is into His own likeness. "Washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God"—this is St. Paul's doctrine of the Christian life.

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In three passages in the Corinthian Letters, the truth of God's indwelling is explicitly stated, but it is implicit in all St. Paul's thought. "Ye are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Cor. iii. 16, also vi. 19; 2 Cor. vi. 16). In other passages it is the Indwelling Christ, or Spirit of Christ, which is spoken of: "Know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? unless indeed ye be reprobate" (2 Cor. xiii. 5). Reference has already been made to the passage in Romans, one part of which adds a further truth: "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (viii. 9—10). This very definite statement, as also the stern rebuke "unless ye be reprobate," would justify the conclusion that all Christians, as such, have the Spirit dwelling in them, not necessarily in the same conscious fulness, but each in his own measure. The Christian life is essentially a life in the Spirit.

This intimacy of fellowship, Spirit with spirit, is the foundation truth of all St. Paul's thought, the fundamental fact in his own religious life, and it is of the utmost importance that we should enter into the fulness of his faith. In part, at least, this is the common faith of all Christians. It is not difficult to believe that a Divine power is working in us, a gracious influence of truth and goodness, but this power is often thought of only as impersonal

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spirit, a radiation, as it were, from God, who Himself remains distant and unapproached. The term itself, by reason of its manifold uses, increases the danger of resting in general ideas, even when we speak of the Spirit of God. We think of some principle, some activity *of* God, rather than of God Himself as Spirit. Further, *spirit* is itself a physical term, easily lending itself to nature-symbols as illustrations of God's indwelling, as of the air in which man lives and which may be said also to live in man.

Only as we learn to know our own nature and fill the term *spirit* with the essential qualities of personality—thought, affection, will—shall we rise to any worthy realisation of the sublime truth: “God is Spirit.” And just as thought is where its power is, and will is where it acts, and love is where it rests, so the Holy Spirit who is Truth, and Will, and Love, is where His truth, His moral will, His love, inspire and control. God, who is Spirit, ever works in closest fellowship with the spirit which man also is, and which He creates, sustains, and would perfect in His own likeness—this I believe to be St. Paul’s teaching.

(2) *The Spirit of Life*.—This is implied in the simplest title, The Spirit, so frequently used by the Apostle. The Spirit quickens life because He is life, hence the phrase, “the Spirit of the Living

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God" (2 Cor. iii. 3), and this, "the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 2). Arising necessarily out of this truth is the doctrine of the "new birth," the beginning of the new life in the Christian, "the birth from above," "the Baptism of the Spirit"—"for in one Spirit were we all baptised into one body, and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. xii. 13).

(3) *The Spirit of Sonship*.—The new birth is the awakening of love, the quickening of the conscious sense of sonship. "When it was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. i. 16) is the Apostle's statement of his conversion. This sonship, like the natural human relation, is based upon essential kinship—"Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). And just as the realisation of our natural sonship in all that is tender and true therein is, as it were, a second birth, quickened by the unfolding of mother-love, so also is our Divine sonship the gift of God, who by the revelation of His Fatherhood awakens the response of love; thus is "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us" (Rom. v. 5). This recognition and response of sonship is "the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. viii. 15). And this recognition is mutual, "the Spirit Himself beareth witness

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with (conjointly with the witness of) our spirit, that we are children of God" (Rom. viii. 16). This is "the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus" which delivers from sin and death, and establishes in true freedom, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty," the inward spirit of love freeing from the bondage of mere outward rules.

(4) *The Spirit of Power*.—Once and again St. Paul uses the phrase "the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. xv. 13 and 19; 1 Cor. ii. 4; 1 Thes. i. 5), and the idea is never absent from his thought. The "diversities of working" of the Spirit enumerated by the Apostle (1 Cor. xii.) indicate the manifestation of extraordinary powers in the earliest Christian Societies. The particular character and spiritual significance of these endowments has been and must continue to be the subject of much discussion. Modern psychology has thrown some light thereon, but the Apostle's definite statement that these "powers" were gifts of the Spirit remains. The most important guidance is found in St. Paul's own conclusions, first, that there are "the greater gifts" to be earnestly desired, and second, that there is "a still more excellent way." The thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, over and above its own Divine message, serves, as indeed it was designed, to direct our thought not to that which is special in the Christian life, but to the Christian

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life itself, as the highest demonstration of the Spirit.

(5) *The Spirit of Truth*.—St. Paul declares that his preaching was “not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth ; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. ii. 13). Apart from the inward illumination of the Spirit there is, he declares, no knowledge of the things of God. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him ; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged” (1 Cor. ii. 14). The *natural man* represents human nature apart from God ; the *spiritual man* is human nature enlightened by the indwelling Spirit. Man is by nature spiritual, as he is by nature a son of God, but just as the response of sonship is awakened by the Spirit, so also is spiritual discernment quickened and developed by the Spirit, though not without human effort, as we shall indicate later.

In a very real sense the Spirit’s work must be thought of as entering into all realms of truth. “The interest of God in our life is as broad as life itself.” St. Paul, however, is writing expressly of the religious life, and of religious truth, and in this realm he indicates that there are boundaries and limitations of the work of the Spirit. It is not *all* truth, but particular truths, which the Spirit

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teacheth, “things which eye saw not and ear heard not,” but which are revealed through the Spirit (1 Cor. ii. 9—10), that is to say, the things of Christ which the Apostle preached, “the mind of Christ.” The evidence of the Spirit’s absence is an unglorified Christ; the witness of the Spirit’s presence is Christ known and obeyed (1 Cor. xii. 3). To interpret and enforce the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ, to continue and complete His work, is the mission of the Spirit of Truth.

(6) *The Spirit of Holiness*.—The Church, with one consent, accepts the name “The Holy Spirit” as best expressing her faith and hope. The Holiness of the Spirit is the full and perfect Christian Life. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control” (Gal. v. 22, 23). The Kingdom, for the coming of which the whole Church unites in daily prayer, is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. xiv. 17). The Spirit is God Himself, and God is Love. So holiness is “the love of the Spirit” (Rom. xv. 30), and the Christian life is “love in the Spirit” (Col. i. 8), or simply, and all-inclusively, Love (1 Cor. xiii.).

The surpassing grace of Love, in all its energies and activities, is told in the Apostle’s inspired words in his lyrical ode to Love, but how true it is that “love never faileth” finds illustration in his tender

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appeal to those in whom the Spirit of Love dwells, to care for the erring : “ Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, *ye which are spiritual*, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness” (Gal. vi. 1.).

(7) *The Spirit of Hope*.—Amongst all the Benedictions there is none surpassing this : “ The God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit ” (Rom. xv. 13). The Christian Hope, in all its fulness and inspiration, is a work of the Spirit, who is ever and in all, the Spirit of Hope. “ We through the Spirit, by faith, wait for the hope of righteousness ” (Gal. v. 5). The very life of prayer, all askings, all the unuttered voices of need and longing, are of the Spirit, who “ maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God ” (Rom. viii. 26f.).

In an outburst of confident and triumphant faith St. Paul exclaims : “ If God is for us, who is against us ? ” Realising what the Holy Spirit works and is in the Christian’s life, we may well repeat his question. The answer is direct and searching : “ Quench not the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit of Life and of Power dwells with us and in us, but the integrity of human personality is unimpaired, the spirit of man is not crushed, but strengthened, ennobled, conformed to the Divine Will, and yet

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in all and through all conscious of his own independence and choice. "Our obedience is not God's but ours ; but though it be not God's, yet it is God Himself in us, enabling us to be ourselves, and to render to Him what is ours."

That this was St. Paul's doctrine all his rebukes and exhortations prove. The call is ever to personal effort, to unceasing and whole-hearted endeavour. In all his Epistles this note is heard, but it is the very keynote of the Epistle to the Galatians, who "having begun in the Spirit," thought to be "perfected in the flesh." "Sow to the Spirit," be "led by the Spirit," "walk by the Spirit," "live by the Spirit"—so the Apostle exhorts them. The weakness of the flesh, our human infirmities, the difficulties, hindrances, temptations and consequent conflicts which meet us in the Way, all are recognised by the great Apostle, and because of these and for their overcoming, he calls for heroic efforts of self-devotion and unceasing endeavour. But not alone, unfriended and unhelped—that could not be his gospel who so realised the real Presence of the Holy Helpful Spirit. Rather does he say that much of this inward striving is occasioned by that Holy Presence. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ; for these are contrary the one to the other ; *that ye may not do the things that ye would*" (Gal. v. 17). The

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restraints of the Spirit are, in many lives, the wonders of Divine Grace.

And in this life of effort, help is to be found in the Christian Society. It is not a merely individualistic, isolated life which the Spirit inspires. The full life is a "fellowship in the Spirit"; and the Benediction of the Church, in which each member is called to share, is "the Communion of the Holy Spirit."

But neither in any single life, nor in the whole Body, is the fulness of the Spirit known; all is in the making, and what is now enjoyed is but "the first fruits of the Spirit," "the earnest of the Spirit," the pledge of the richer inheritance which is ours in Christ.

Thus, very inadequately and with many omissions, is St. Paul's teaching summarised, but behind the teaching is the Mystic-saint himself. How shall we gain fellowship with the life behind the thought, and enter into the experience out of which all his teaching flows?

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“Then with a ripple and a radiance thro’ me
Rise and be manifest, O Morning Star!
Flow on my soul, thou Spirit, and renew me,
Fill with Thyself, and let the rest be far.

Safe to the hidden house of Thine abiding
Carry the weak knees and the heart that faints.”

Now the vision of rapture and then the cloud—

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then the whispers of faith and hope, the certainty
of a Love which cannot fail, which is present even
in the darkness and pain—

“Then thro’ the mid complaint of my confession,
Then thro’ the pang and passion of my prayer,
Leaps with a start the shock of His possession,
Thrills me and touches, and the Lord is there.”

• • • • •
“Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny:
Yea with one voice, O world, tho’ thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.”

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